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News. Clues. Kingdom views.

CHRISTIANCOURIER

Casting out fear: Marilynne Robinson

Phil Christman

As she introduced Marilynne Robinson to a relatively full Van Noord Arena, Calvin College English professor Jennifer Holberg commented that it was good to have the Orange Prize-winning novelist "playing for Team Calvin."

In the impromptu talk that followed, Robinson wasn't captain, but coach. She spoke in shamelessly exhortative terms to and of a needlessly demoralized and fearful U.S. Christian community. Glossing 1 John 4:18 ("Perfect love casts out fear"), Robinson attacked notions of cultural decline or secularist rot. Like the editors of her beloved Geneva Bible, Robinson fearlessly applied her text to current events.

It is "extraordinary," she began, that, "during a time when people are making claims to the Christian nature of the culture, they are at the same time indulging in degrees and kinds of fear that seem to me to be completely un-Christian." Christians, she said, "feel as if they're truly an embattled minority ... surrounded by barbarians who have no other interest in life than to dismantle their sacred places or something. I think it's bizarre."

She cited herself as counter-evidence: "One of the things I do hope that my admittedly rather strange career demonstrates is that if you write something that means something to you, basically, there's a very good chance that it'll mean something to the Pulitzer committee,



for heaven's sake — these people who may never have left Manhattan for generations. It is my persistent experience that people are more than happy to be gracious to religious expression that is also gracious to them." Christians, she reminded the audience, still constitute the overwhelming majority of the U.S. population.

Robinson, who teaches at the Iowa Writers' Workshop — among the most prestigious creative-writing programs in the world — described her students as victims of a narrative

of cultural decline, a secular story of inevitable dumbing-down and increased illiteracy that parallels the right-wing Christian belief in

oncoming decadence. "Don't dare," she said, summarizing the messages that her students have internalized. "Don't read the ... great books

Calvin College's biennial Festival of Faith and Writing took place on April 19-21, 2012. Our lead articles this issue cover two of the plenary speakers, Marilynne Robinson and Jonathan Safran Foer, and a round-up of Festival lectures can be found on page 20.

because it takes better minds than yours to read them, and so on."

"All these [are] anxieties that we internalize, and then they create us," she continued. "They create us around a smaller model of ourselves than is worthy of ourselves."

She spoke of conservative talk radio. "There are a lot of people now who live in this country as if they were living in an alien and hostile land. And, you know, every once in a while I turn on the radio just to see what these people are talking about, and my hair gets a little grayer every time, and I find out that they really detest, you know, liberal college professors who teach in these secular universities. And I think, *that's me*. And apparently we're conspiring to

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Reading between the lines: Jonathan Safran Foer

Jenica Groot-Nibbelink

At 35, Jonathan Safran Foer has published three works of fiction, two works of non-fiction and a variety of short stories and essays. His first two novels, *Everything is Illuminated* and *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* have already been made into films. Foer's work has been received positively by critics and lay readers alike. His first book,

Everything is Illuminated, won the National Jewish Book Award and the Guardian First Book Award. His work is often commended for its creative incorporation of visual images. *The Tree of Codes*, for example, is a story whose narrative is die cut from Bruno Shultz's collection of short stories, *The Street of Crocodiles*. But more often than not, what is compelling about Foer's

work is his ability to tell stories that are, as his character Oscar says, both "beautiful and true."

At this year's Festival of Faith and Writing, attendees had the pleasure of listening to Foer speak twice; he gave a plenary address on Thursday evening and an interview the following morning. Foer ended his plenary lecture with words from

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"Christians feel as if they're truly an embattled minority ... surrounded by barbarians who have no other interest in life than to dismantle their sacred places or something. I think it's bizarre."

News

Robinson *continued*

do X and Y and Z. I did not get the memo, I'll tell you *that*."

She reminded the Festival of Faith and Writing audience, and by proxy all North American Christians, of their historically extraordinary affluence and security. "We, here, live with a certain level of threat. By world standards, and by historical standards, it's a very, very low level of threat. If there have ever been people on earth who should have been able to take a deep breath and say 'Thank God, we're the people.' And yet, she went on, "here we are, huddled in these sort of psycho-emotional bomb shelters ... if we're going to be safe by any standards the world has ever seen, if we're going to be stable by any standards the world has ever seen, why not enjoy it?"

"This is not the siege of Paris," she continued, to general applause.

"I can't believe what I hear people complaining about. You know, I being the woman that I am, having the strange interests that I have, I love the internet.... If I can find out what the law was in 17th-century colonial Maryland, I'm a happy woman!"

"Do we expect never to have a bad time?" she continued. "I mean, God loved Israel, you know? Of course, of course, every generation or so, something goes haywire.... It's human history."

Earlier generations

Addressing those who idealize the America of the '40s and '50s, she said, "the idea that the good things that people have done in previous generations amounted to some kind of satin cushion that our generations are supposed to be carried on – it's bizarre! Not to speak of not particularly admirable."

Referring again to her students, she said, "I can't idealize an earlier generation of youth. These people are wonderful."

Foer *continued*

a poem by the Israeli poet, Yehuda Amichai:

A man doesn't have time in his life
to have time for everything...
He will die as figs die in autumn,
Shriveled and full of himself and sweet,
the leaves growing dry on the ground,
the bare branches pointing to the place
where there's time for everything.

After listening to Foer delight and instruct – but more often delight – with his stories, his audience understood these words as a fitting description of Foer's own aesthetic sensibilities. For Foer's stories are full of the stuff of life: beauty and ugliness, truth and falsehood, joy and pain, love and hate. In his own work, Foer fulfills Amichai's suggestion that "man needs to love and to hate at the same moment / to laugh and cry with the same eyes." For example, Foer couples a tragic subject with great comedic moments in his best-known book *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*. The personal journey of a precocious nine-year-old learning to cope with his father's death in the 9/11 attack is filled with much joy and laughter as well as sadness. Likewise, Foer's plenary lecture was a series of short, personal stories whose contents were both moving and hilarious (his revisionist history of Calvin College, for example, featured a large army of gerbils located underneath the Fieldhouse).

But much of Foer's insight that was slipped between the lines of the stories he told in his plenary lecture came into full view in his interview with Calvin English Professor Jane Zwart the next morning. Here Foer spoke candidly on everything from the writing process to silence, from prayer to the existence of God. For Foer, stories are important because they actively transmit values from one human to another. The stories of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are, says Foer, "the greatest stories ever told" and "the most important stories in my life." Referring to his own stories, Foer revealed his hope for his readers: "I never wanted to write a novel that was merely

I think that the worst hardship that they have to deal with is the idea of decline, the idea that whatever they have is not going to be good enough, and also that the decline is organic, like some [1930s] German mythology ... so that the bare fact of people being brilliant and well-intentioned is not going to cut any ice, because the great cultural organism is beginning to sprout mushrooms, or something."

"It's the fear that we're falling behind in some competition that makes it so that we're putting a downward pressure on our own people," she said.

Widespread fear, she suggested, has even turned some U.S. citizens murderous. "We have begun to rationalize preemptive

"There's a huge argument to be made for the courage of risking respect toward whomever you encounter. There is an elegance in that. It's a beautiful thing.... It's what God intends."

defense," she said, referring to Florida's controversial stand-your-ground law and its role in the recent murder of black teenager Trayvon Martin. "You can actually use lethal force against someone you *think* is a threat to you. Now there are a lot of people who are not good judges of the degree to which other people are a threat!... Our whole carapace of legal protection, that we have developed over so many years, is swept away, and in fact we've gone back to a sort of vigilante mentality."

As the U.S. intelligentsia continue to debate whether to undertake or support a first strike against Iran, Robinson sounded the evening's most urgent note. "We have taken the idea of preemptive self-defense to an international level.... This is very disturbing to me. Read the Bible end to end. Read Calvin end to end, and over again. You'll never find the suggestion that there's a human being on earth who is

not made in the image of God."

"When you are dealing with somebody on the street, or looking at that country and saying *Hmm, you may intend me lethal harm* – where does civilization go then? How could we do that? In Iowa they passed something called a shall-carry law, meaning there's a positive encouragement toward the population to go armed. What country are we living in? Who do you want to shoot? You know, which image of God has been getting on your nerves lately?"

On Biblical grounds, she said, "There's a huge argument to be made for the courage of risking respect toward whomever you encounter. There is an elegance in that. It's a beautiful thing.... It's what God intends."

She concluded on a hopeful note, connecting literature, politics and theology. "If you're frightened, you can't make a good model of reality. If you're frightened you're not a good judge of any circumstance. If you're frightened you've already given in to anyone who's trying to coerce you. If you're frightened you have let yourself be deprived of a very essential element of your dignity. And if you're frightened," she finished, "you don't trust God."

"God has never told us that we would leave this world alive. God has never told us that we would be spared any difficulty, but God has told us that he gave us a soul, that he gave us a life that is sacred, however troubled, however brief, and that's what we have to honor and protect, and the way we protect it is by trusting God and abandoning fear." ➤

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... liked or appreciated. I wanted the reader to be complicit in the authorship of the book." This statement illuminates Foer's approach in both his lecture and his novels. Just as readers of *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* must work to interpret the pictures and flip-book images interspersed throughout the story, the audience at his plenary lecture needed to read between the lines of his personal anecdotes.

Fragmentation

Foer's narrative technique is by no means traditional. In his novels, he often switches from one character's voice to another's, resulting in a fragmented narrative style. In *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, Foer includes a few blank pages in the middle of the narrative to signify the absent voice of Oscar's silent grandfather. When asked about this scene in the novel, Foer replied that he wanted to foreground what usually precedes all writing: the failure to adequately express the great horrors and joys we experience. "In my books," said Foer, "silence is not the silence of reflection ... or peace. It's about not being able to communicate. A lot of my writing is about not being able to communicate things in my life." In other words, for Foer,

the purpose of art is to express, rather than escape, reality.

His desire for art lines up with Foer's own sense of his fragmented narrative style. He incorporates a multiplicity of characters' voices into his writing because we experience the world through a multiplicity of fragmented voices. We walk down the sidewalk, Foer explained, listening to podcasts on our iPods all the while hearing snippets of the radio from the cars whizzing by. All these sounds are interspersed with those of the natural world. It is the conventions of the 19th century novel with its unified, omniscient narrators that are bizarre, said Foer, because they do not adequately express the 21st century experience of the world. But Foer's aim in his writing is not only to express 21st experience but to make the "ordinary strange" and reveal "the spectacular in the mundane." He writes so that his readers might look at this world with fresh eyes.

Perhaps the most interesting portion of Foer's lecture and interview were his comments on the relation between art (specifically writing) and religion. To signify the commonalities between art and religion, Foer gave an analogy of childbirth. For a time, the existence of an unborn child must be believed in before it can be heard or felt or seen. Similarly, art and religion are about belief and risk. The "exodus" from idea to thing in the writing process is a journey which requires faith. Likewise, said Foer, "religion is beautiful because of the strong possibility that it is not true." When asked about his faith during the interview, Foer concluded that he was not interested in a "comfortable" religion. Instead, he was "interested in religion that makes things harder ... that forces me to take stock of myself and ask hard questions of who am I really?" While we may disagree with these words from the self-declared agnostic Jewish writer, it is fascinating to hear such candour and honesty about faith from an important 21st century-American writer. ➤

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Column/Editorial

Christ @ Culture

Lloyd Rang



There's a note that's circulating on Facebook. It goes something like this: "My curfew was street lights. I played outside, not online. Hand Sanitizer didn't exist, but I could get my mouth washed out with soap. I rode a bike without a helmet. Click 'like' if you drank water from the garden hose and survived."

Ah, nostalgia. It makes us look back through the gauzy filter of memory at our own childhood or youth, where we see a better, simpler time. And we feel that kids today are too coddled, too protected and have it too easy.

Get any group of parents over the age of 30 together and pretty soon they'll complain that kids are "bubble wrapped." They point back to the mythical '60s, '70s, or '80s as a time when "kids were allowed to be kids" and take risks, and get hurt... and it was all for the best, because they got to experience "real life."

People get nostalgic pretty easily. But, oddly enough, nostalgia was considered a psychiatric disorder until the early 20th century. Yep, you heard that right: if you looked back with excessive fondness on days gone by, people literally thought you were crazy.

And that's not as crazy as it sounds. Because if we're honest – REALLY honest with ourselves – some of the things we did as kids were pretty dumb. Some of the toys we played with were quite unsafe. And our parents could be a little negligent, at times.

If today's parents hover over their kids like helicopters, earlier generations of parents were like rocket launchers – when they needed some time to themselves they'd open the door and fire the kids outside. In retrospect, that might have been a bit careless. Of course, I didn't personally get killed when I was playing all over the neighbourhood, unsupervised – but it wasn't for lack of opportunity or effort on my part.

Before I turned 16, I had almost drowned in a pool, grabbed a downed power wire with my bare hands, tried to jump out a second-story window, been grazed by a bullet, been beaten up by an adult stranger, sledded onto the street in front of a car and set my stuffed bear on fire nearly burning the house down.

Now, in fairness to my mom, she stopped me from leaping to my death and extinguished my smouldering teddy bear – but in all the other cases of impending and actual bodily harm, parents were well out of screaming distance and practically in another postal code.

No shortage of danger

But you didn't have to be a careless twit like me to get hurt. Just



Old style lawn darts were more dangerous than they appear.

playing with everyday toys could actually and literally kill you. In the 1980s, lawn darts were responsible for four deaths in the U.S. and thousands of severe injuries before they were pulled from shelves. Clackers – which

Click 'like' if you survived

were two ceramic balls on a string slammed together at high speed – were actually used by street gangs as weapons in the 1970s. And in the 1950s, kids could buy the Gilbert U-238 Atomic Energy Lab – which included four different kinds of deadly radioactive isotopes and a working Geiger counter.

If, like my mom, you grew up in Holland during WWII, you grew up with dangers most people can't even imagine now. So the terrible truth about my childhood and yours is that it wasn't a better, simpler time. It was a much more dangerous time. The statistics prove it. A 2012 study in the United States found that children are five times less likely to be killed in an accident than they were in the 1950s, and 30 percent less likely to die than just 12 years ago. That's thanks to safety devices like airbags, child seats, and bike and sports helmets. And drowning-related accidents are down too, by 50 percent since the early 1990s.

Vaccination programs and improved health care mean that kids today are up to six times less likely to die from disease than they were in the 1950s. Chicken pox – once seen as a harmless childhood disease – was actually responsible for over 100 deaths every year in Canada. Today, thanks to freely available vaccines, that number is down to just over 10 and falling.

So by all means click "like" on one of those Facebook posts if you survived. And congratulations. But let's not pretend we had it better as kids. We didn't. Many of us have scars – physical and psychological – that prove otherwise.

Real accomplishments

But as adults, on the other hand, I think we've done some things we can be proud of. We did what all good parents have always done: we strived to do just a little better for our kids than our parents did for us. We made sure our kids have safer toys than we had, safer parks, more crash-resistant cars, free vaccination programs and schools that don't just turn a blind eye when a child is bullied. That's progress. That's a good thing. That, I "like."

What's a bit disturbing is the growing, subtle backlash against protecting our kids. It wasn't that long ago, historically speaking, that there were no child labour laws. There are still many places in the world – right now – where children are used as slave labour. What we want is for those places to make progress, not for us to go backwards.

The fact is that our kids are blessed. Which means we're blessed, as parents, too. Our children are better protected than any generation that has come before. They'll have every opportunity to be happy and healthy. And fewer families are grieving the loss of a child – which is the greatest of all possible tragedies – because we worked hard to keep more kids safe.

You and I see our children as precious. We see them, as the evangelist Henry Ward Beecher once said, as "the hands by which we take hold of heaven." It's okay to treat them that way. In fact, it's our duty.

Lloyd Rang lives in Bowmanville, Ont.

Helplessness blues



Michael Buma

One of the indie rock darlings of 2011 was a song called "Helplessness Blues" by Fleet Foxes, which placed near the top of many critics' best songs lists for that year. "Helplessness Blues" seemed to touch a nerve among young people struggling with feelings of uncertainty, indirection, futility, confusion and, of course, helplessness regarding their senses of purpose and vocation. Today's young adults have a powerful sense of wanting to contribute to something bigger than themselves, but a scarcity of vocational opportunities to do so (I wrote about this on a personal level in my last editorial, "The cruellest month" CC April 9). They've been told their whole lives that if they work hard and get a university education they'll "succeed," but upon graduation many quickly find that this isn't the case. One of the narratives surrounding today's young adults is that they're an "entitlement generation," that they expect everything to be given to them without any work. In some cases this is probably true, but my experience with young people suggests that most of them work incredibly hard and consistently rise to expectations when given the chance. What's absent is opportunity, not work ethic or strength of character.



I recently had coffee with a former student, one of the brightest lights in my Canadian literature survey course last year. Despite graduating with an Honours BA and having applied for more than 50 jobs, the only work he had been able to find was shelving DVDs at Blockbuster. When Blockbuster went bankrupt he found himself out of work again, thoroughly discouraged and feeling quite defeated. I've lost count of the number of people I know with Honours BAs (and even some MAs and PhDs) who have had to go on to applied community college programs, and even this extra training isn't always enough to land something more than a "McJob." It's no surprise that whenever new job stats are released they come with a disclaimer that the numbers don't include all the people who have simply given up. Perhaps most discouraging in all this is that many of the people I know who *have* been able to find fulfilling jobs have done so in part through some social or familial connection. As the old saying goes, "it's not what you know but who you know." In today's economy, competent people without connections are pretty much out of luck.

The emotional and psychological stresses that stem from unemployment and underemployment are very real. For instance, American alcohol abuse increases by 17 percent for every one percent increase in unemployment. And consider the following comments from a participant in the August 2011 riots in London, England: "These f---ing shops, like, I've given them a hundred CVs, not one job. That's why I left my house. Why haven't I even got an interview? I feel like I haven't been given the same opportunities as other people have. At the end of the day, yeah, maybe I have got a bit of hate in my heart."

How to respond

There's no question that lack of opportunity can harden people's hearts. But how should churches respond to people suffering through the "helplessness blues?" I don't presume to have any definitive answers – I'm very much working through this spiritual struggle myself – but I do have a few suggestions for whatever they're worth.

First, churches need to acknowledge the lack of opportunity faced by today's young people in their preaching and teaching. We need to find regular ways to put these issues

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Editorials

Helplessness blues *continued*

on the table and an appropriate language with which to deal with them collectively. In the same way that the entire congregation supports an individual member through debilitating illness or the loss of a loved one, we need to collectively carry people who struggle with vocational challenges and acknowledge their burdens as serious and real.

Part of taking these struggles seriously means recognizing that empathy is the best form of encouragement. When talking to people about their career paths and frustrations, we should not attempt to reassure them with the empty-sounding hope that "something will come up." Nor should we try to be overly cheerful or optimistic, or attempt to recast their situation as an "opportunity." And under no circumstances should we offer empty platitudes or banal reassurances like "when God closes a door he opens a window." I can't imagine a more flippant or destructive thing to say.

Churches also need to make it abundantly clear that they take young people seriously by involving them in worship and ministry programs at all levels. The Apostle Paul tells Timothy not to "let anyone look down on you because you are young" (1 Timothy 4:12), and we would be wise to take this teaching seriously. Part of this might mean making it explicitly clear that time and talents can be pledged instead of money and that this sort of contribution is equally valuable.

Another thing we could stand to do is adjust our philosophy of education somewhat. We in the CRC have historically been quite invested in the value of academic education, and this is one of the most wonderful things about our tradition. Simply put, a full and mature person should be shaped and formed by some consideration of "the best which has been thought and said" (to borrow a rather worn out phrase from Mathew Arnold). But unfortunately this belief has caused us to become rather narrow in our focus, and to place somewhat lower value on applied knowledge, skills and craftsmanship. It seems to me that a full and complete education should range from scientific method to soteriology, Socrates to Sartre, soccer to saxophone and sewing to small engine repair. In other words, we should be encouraging and enabling our young people to become as well-rounded as possible (while at the same time, of course, paying attention to areas of giftedness and inherent aptitude).

Adjusting expectations

Finally, and this is quite significant, I think we need to change the way we manage young people's expectations about God's "calling" on their lives. If you've been to a youth convention or profession of faith lately, chances are you've heard Jeremiah 29:11 being thrown around with the certainty of a creed: "'I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.'" The uptake of this verse among many young people is that God promises us "success" in life, kind of the Christian equivalent of "if you can dream it you can do it." Who wouldn't want to worship such a God? Who wouldn't want to join a church whose members' safety and success appears divinely underwritten?

This view of calling, however, sets us up for failure in our relationship with God when the "hope and a future" we envision doesn't materialize. In such circumstances it's very easy to say that God isn't delivering on his promises, when in reality the problem is more that we aren't delivering on our discipleship. We would be wise, then, to impart Jeremiah 29:11 to our young people with a little hermeneutical balance. Ecclesiastes 9:11, perhaps? "The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong, nor does food come to the wise or wealth to the brilliant or favour to the learned; but time and chance happen to them all."

While there are plenty of passages that could serve equally well as spiritual ballast, the point – to borrow words from Terry Eagleton – is this: "Christian faith, as I understand it, is not primarily a matter of signing on for the proposition that there exists a Supreme Being, but the kind of

commitment made manifest by a human being at the end of his tether, foundering in darkness, pain, and bewilderment, who nevertheless remains faithful to the promise of a transformative love." Faithfulness in all situations is the cost of discipleship, but the only guarantee it comes with remains the best we could hope for: forgiveness and redemption. While fostering this outlook won't necessarily make the "helplessness blues" any easier, it will equip us to weather these storms with steadfastness, clarity, authenticity and love.

Michael Buma teaches in the English and Kinesiology departments at the University of Western Ontario, and is interim editor of the Christian Courier.

Love: being slow to speak, quick to listen



Mike Wagenman

In my previous article ("Youth, young adults and the state of the church," CC April 23), I raised some questions about a "curriculum" model of faith formation. I'm concerned that we are trying to raise youth and young adults in the church in ways that may fundamentally betray the Christian faith and worldview we seek to impart. And I worry that our attempts to "tell" the next generation what to believe or how to behave are disconnecting and backfiring.

Now I would like to offer an alternative model for faith formation. I have been inspired by G.C. Berkouwer when he wrote that "theology is occupied in continuous and obedient listening to the Word. And since listening, unlike remembering, is always a thing of the present moment, theological questions must have relevance and timeliness. Theology is not a complex system constructed for their own entertainment by scholars in the quiet retreat of their ivory towers. It must have significance for the unquiet times; but it can achieve its proper relevance only in obedient attentiveness, not to the times first of all, but to the Word."

I would like to suggest that faith formation happens when we listen to our youth rather than talk at them, when we are open and receptive to the next generation rather than when we fear change or uncomfortable questions. This is what love looks like and I believe we need to seriously consider a "loving" model of faith formation. While a "curriculum" model leads to talking (teaching, monologue), love leads to listening (being open, receptive to the other). Ultimately, Christian discipleship is an enterprise of love. It seeks a deep receptivity, a tender listening for God and others. It is this same loving and receptive heart that we need to bring to our engagements with youth and young adults as they explore the Christian faith for themselves.

Part of the diagnosis regarding why significant numbers of youth and young adults are walking away from faith and/or the church is a lack of or a cooling of love. Which means that the prescription we need involves a deep rekindling of love.

Rekindling love

What did the risen Christ say to the Church in Ephesus? "I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance.... But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first" (Revelation 2:2,4 NRSV). With Jesus, you can have all the religious information but if you don't have love, it's worthless. Nothing can compensate for a lack of love. When love has grown cold, life with God disintegrates.



Martin Luther nails his 95 theses to the church door. Have the children of the Reformation relegated God and Scripture to the sidelines?

Jamie Smith at Calvin College has written about how love is not primarily fostered through the downloading of information. Humans are not just thinking beings who desire more data. The level of love does not automatically rise as the amount of theology or church history knowledge increases.

A few years ago I met with a group of CRC students on campus who had asked to have a conversation about how to grow in faith while at a public university. I suggested a number of liturgical habits: Bible reading, prayer, service, small group discipleship, etc. – concrete formative practices that knit one into Christ and community. I remember the students' reactions: they unanimously said that it was laughably unrealistic, that no one wanted to spend so much time on such a marginal issue as faith. They had been conditioned to want a quick bit of information. We've given our youth a lot of slick information but we've struggled to model and inspire deep love.

As I reflect on the reasons why so many students seem allergic to deep faith formation, it seems there are a few tough questions we need to explore and ponder. First, why is it that so many Reformed students become disillusioned to serious faith formation at Christian schools, of all places? This is quite ironic because the inverse seems to be the implied way forward by some: strip Christian education of its faith content and flatten it out to just another private school which will prepare students for academic "excellence." Has a "curriculum" model of faith formation become institutionalized in our Christian schools where faith is conceived as an intellectual game, one which has no tangible or appreciative connection to the rest of life? Why do students graduate from Christian high school feeling like they've graduated from faith formation?

See Love on page 5

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Letters

Do we need the Belhar to speak the truth?

Albert Hamstra wants us to be honest and speak the truth through the Belhar Confession (CC, March 12, 2012). I confess to being impatient and irked about all this feverish debate over a foreign document and experience. If we need another creed, which I doubt, then at least have it be indigenous to both our time and our own place. I must say, though, that I find Hamstra's argument for the Belhar the most intriguing and profound that I have come across.

What is his reason for promoting the Belhar among us? The so-called minorities among us recognize themselves in its language. *That* is a pretty profound reason I have not heard before and has made me re-think my basically negative stance. However, after the re-think, I still do not favour the step.

Hamstra has still another reason. He feels we need the document *as a creed* to speak the truth about ourselves, about the church's "old games of power and abuse." He has found these games in both the Asian church where he served and in his present context, the CRC's "Pentagon" or service centre in Grand Rapids. Probably correctly, he suspects it to be similar in CRC Canada. We need Belhar to speak the truth about ourselves, about our games of power

and abuse, he argues.

I would like to suggest a simpler way. Why go through all these ecclesiastical contortions of turning foreign documents into creeds because the truth needs to be told? Why not just say it in our own language – plain, clear and simple? Why not describe those games among us and deal with them, instead of pouring them into the generalities of the "respectable" language of ecclesia land and put them on the shelf alongside the oldies?

If these games are being played among us in our institutions, then those of us who see them in operation should not try to salve their consciences by describing these games in "respectable" ecclesiastical language. We don't need a creed to speak the truth. If we see these games in operation, then we *name* the game in order to deal with it in a Christian way: confess, repent and change.

You see it before you? You are surrounded by it? It has already been turned into a public matter by the publication of Hamstra's article. What remains now is to describe the concrete situation in ordinary language. Just tell us what's happening so we can deal with it.

John H. Boer
Vancouver, B.C.

Love *continued*

Inside the 'bubble'

Or, what about our tight-knit mono-cultural communities which insulate students from the hard questions and harsh realities of the diverse non-Christian world? They've grown up in the "bubble" and they are very happy to transplant their "bubbles" wherever they go after high school. If they go to a public college or university, they expect Christian ministries on campus to provide them with a surrogate "bubble" to remain compartmentalized and insulated from the world. Within the "bubble" many students don't develop real relationships with non-Christians or learn how to articulate or relate their faith to the difficult but real questions others put to them. A faith that is never challenged never has the opportunity to grow strong.

Many Reformed communities adopt a "You're a good Christian" mindset about their youth and young adults which makes serious discipleship irrelevant and even unnecessary ... and sometimes even offensive. This shows up in sermons which encourage youth to just be good Canadians, or in the lack of adult Christian educational opportunities that say there's anything new after you're 18 years old, or in the pastor's role being limited to a "caring social worker" rather than a deeply biblical pastor-as-theologian.

Too often the assumption in some of our Reformed circles is that faith is primarily a cognitive or intellectual enterprise (the product of a "curriculum" model) which ends up splitting "belief" from "behaviour" or "faith" from "lifestyle." For many Reformed Christians today, there isn't a drop of tension between, for example, serving on a church council and simultaneously being employed at a multi-national weapons manufacturing corporation. In the history of the church, this would be an unthinkable, even scandalous, lack of love.

The genius of the Reformation was the rediscovery that all of life is lived as love for God and in response to his Word. But presently many children of the Reformation relegate God to the sidelines and margins of life and neglect Scripture as childish and disconnected from the hard realities of life. This produces a jadedness in nominal Christians that resists serious discipleship or faith formation. There simply are bigger fish to fry in life. Love for God has grown cold while simultaneously desire for the sparkling emptiness of the world has increased.

We are in desperate need to find our first love once again – a love grounded in Christ, nurtured in formative liturgical practices that touch on every part of life, oriented toward redemptive service to the world, and shaped by intentional life-long discipleship in community. This is equally applicable to the church as to the campus, adults as well as youth – anywhere where Christian ministry finds itself. We need to find the way to return to the love we had at first. ✂

Mike Wagenman is the Director of The Kuyper Centre for Emerging Scholars (kuypercentre.ca) at Western University.

The Christian schools debate

As a teacher educator committed to developing "excellent" teachers, I have followed the recent discussion about teacher firings in Christian schools with keen interest (see CC April 23, March 26, Feb. 13, and Dec. 12, 2011). Although I work to prepare candidates to teach in both publicly funded and independently financed schools, my heart lies with the Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools. I taught in two OACS schools; in one of them, I was both parent and teacher. I wanted that school to be the best possible school for my children. The 15 years I taught there were some of the best years of my life. I was part of a community that shared the same vision – parents and teachers truly working together to build a thriving school using a consensus governance model which is apparently unrealistic and out-of-date. For many years, I served as a staff representative on the contract partnership committee. I never felt myself to be in an adversarial relationship with the board representatives. I can honestly say that we discussed contracts and salaries in good faith. If Guldemon's analysis is correct (April 23), then we must have been part of the lucky few. But is that a good reason to scrap the ideal, lower the sights and settle for a governance model which is clearly less democratic?

It further saddened (and angered) me to read Vriend's report that some school boards

are willing to break contracts to dismiss teachers without just cause (March 26). Although I disagree sharply with Tamming who blatantly counsels boards to do this (April 23 and Dec. 12, 2011), I am grateful for his candour. He asks, "Since when does sanctity of contract trump the calling of our schools to be centres of Christian excellence?" To which I reply: Since when is that an either-or question? Why can't we honour contracts and build excellent schools? Can you really do one without the other? Doesn't justice, fairness, integrity and faithfulness have something to do with Christian excellence? If the leaders of the school are willing to break promises for the sake of expediency, what effect will that have on the morale and morals of the community of teachers and learners? These school boards lack imagination, not to mention a vision.

I am thankful to Vriend and Witvoet for reminding us about our ethical duty (March 26). I am especially grateful for the strong Reformed Christian vision so well articulated by Joosse (Feb. 13). I hope it is still alive in the vast majority of OACS schools that I hold so dear.

Dirk Windhorst
Assistant Professor of Education,
Redeemer University College
Ancaster, Ont.

Regarding the issue of the "hiring and firing" of Christian school teachers, let me add my opinion. I am a retired teacher with 30 years of experience. I thank John Joosse, John Vriend, Bert Witvoet, Adrian Guldemon and John Tamming for their contributions on this issue (see CC April 23, March 26, Feb. 13, and Dec. 12, 2011).

I don't agree with all of them. However, I do see the need for academic excellence and ethical practices in the Ontario Alliance for Christian Schools.

I grieve for those teachers who have had their contracts terminated in a questionable way and whose families' lives have been

deeply hurt. May the Lord give these families the strength and comfort they need.

I encourage all board members to follow the instruction of Micah 6:8b, "To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." And, to honour the contracts that they have made with their teachers.

I encourage OCSTA (Edifide) and the OACS to encourage and push school boards to create general agreements for all their teachers. Please, treat the teachers like the professionals they are and in your treatment ask yourself, "What would Jesus do?"

Rinke VanderVeen
St. Catharines, Ont.

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News

Korean pastor prays for revival in CRC

LAKEVIEW TERRACE, Calif. (CRCNA) – Rev. Pildo Joung, founding pastor of a large church in Korea, closed the second day of the Christian Reformed Church's first-ever Prayer Summit last month by praying for a great outpouring of revival and God's grace to fall upon CRC congregations across North America.

"Lord God, bring a great revival in the CRC denomination. Lord Jesus, start this as a revival of prayer right now," Joung prayed with a crowd of hundreds of people in the sanctuary of All Nations Church in Lakeview Terrace, Calif.

Joung is the founding pastor of Sooyoungro Presbyterian Church in Busan, Korea. His church, founded in 1975, is now one of the largest in Korea with more than 30,000 people worshipping there each week. The Prayer Summit, held from April 17-19, was the idea of Korean CRCs who invited the denomination to join them for three days of prayer and praise.

Several of the more than 400 people attending said that they have felt a powerful spirit of unity linking them as they sang together, joined hands in prayer, listened to speakers such as Joung and attended small-group sessions and workshops.

Wanting CRC congregations across North America to have a chance to join in this spirit of unity, Prayer Summit organizers set aside one evening as a time to "Watch and Pray." An internet video clip of activities from the opening day was provided, with the hope that CRC congregations would download and watch the video. Then, after watching the video, churches were asked to encourage their members to pray about their own concerns as a way of showing unity with those attending the summit.

Some 40 CRC congregations did download the video, and more than 300 individuals viewed it as well.

Prayer fuels revivals

William Dyrness, a professor of theology and culture at Fuller Theological Seminary, told attendees that prayer has been the prime mover behind all of the great Christian revivals over the centuries. "God's work and revival is almost always started by unexpected people who have had strong biblical teaching and deep inner lives of prayer," he said.

But these prayer-fueled revivals also have taken on important practical expressions. "It's important to realize



that these revivals have had a strong impact across cultures and have broken down racial and denominational barriers in order that God's people could work together," said Dyrness.

Pastors attending the summit discussed what they learned about different types of prayer and especially the prayer styles of Korean CRC congregations. One type of Korean prayer was experienced at a dawn prayer service that began at 5:30 a.m. Called Tong Sung prayer, participants shouted out in unison their prayers and petitions to God. As they did this, a loud, deeply passionate noise arose and filled the church sanctuary.

While some pastors said they were moved by the dawn prayer session, they wondered whether they could introduce this kind of prayer to their congregations. One said it would be "a heavy lift" in his church, given the highly emotional nature of this kind of prayer. Another pastor agreed he would have a hard time bringing this type of prayer into his congregation. He said the Holy Spirit would have to intervene for it to happen. Rev. Dong Il Kim said they use Tong Sung prayer in his congregation in Los Angeles, but agrees that it might not catch on in a non-Korean congregation.

"I love the CRC, but whenever I've suggested that a church use this type of prayer I've found resistance," said Kim, who is also a professor of church history at the International Reformed Theological Seminary, a distance-learning-based institution. "I don't see Tong Sung prayer as an issue of right or wrong. This is one of the many ways we can pray," he said. Many Christians, not only Koreans, have started to pray this way, he said. "We cry out to Jesus in Tong Sung prayer because we love him."

Such prayer has been instrumental in his own prayer life as well as that of church members as his congregation has grown, and continues to grow, he said. But whatever type of prayer occurs, Joung said, he'd like to see people in every church in the CRC start to gather even more often to pray. "When people are praying together, the church will grow."

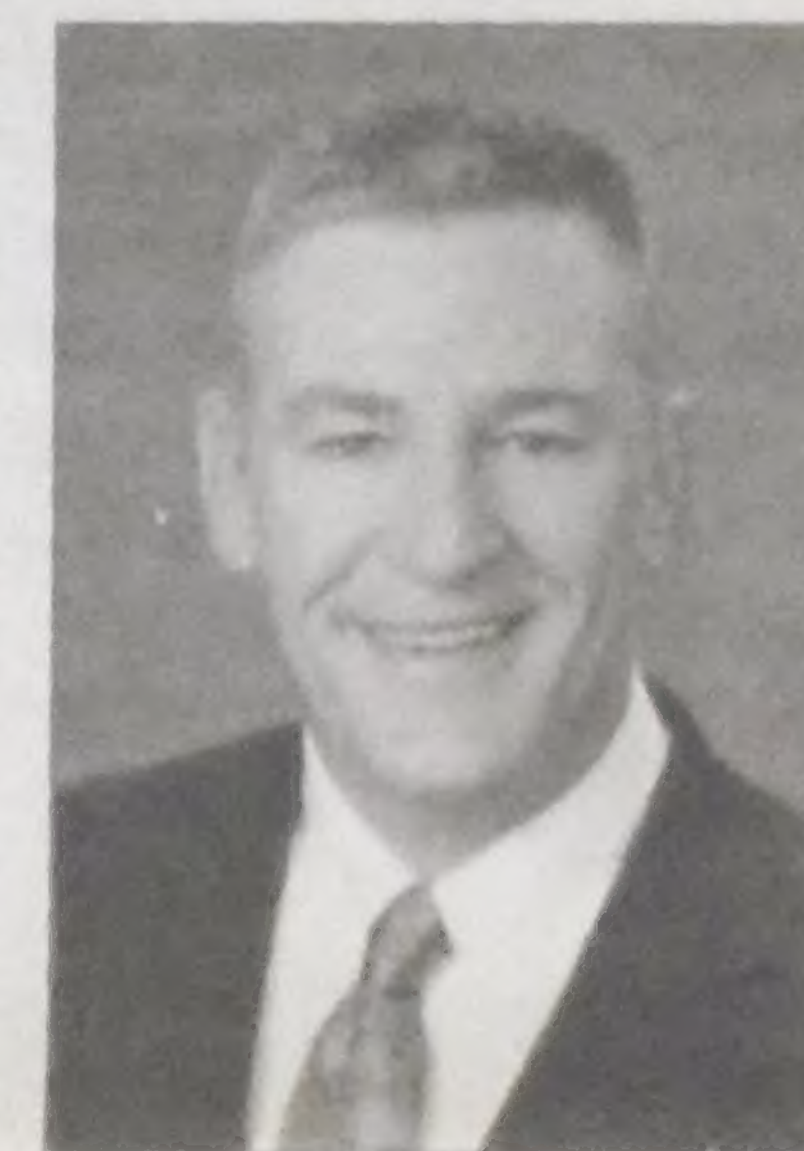
Dordt College chooses new president

SIOUX CENTER, Iowa (DC) – Dr. Erik Hoekstra has been named the fourth president of Dordt College. He is currently the Dordt College provost. The appointment was announced last month after the college board of trustees endorsed a presidential search committee's unanimous recommendation.

"Dr. Hoekstra is very passionate about the college and has a deep-hearted commitment to what Dordt is all about," said board chairman Lloyd Vander Kwaak.

Vander Kwaak said many factors were balanced as candidates were examined. He said the board was keenly interested in ensuring that a new president would help Dordt sustain its strengths in several areas: maintaining a vibrant mission, providing strong leadership, cultivating excellent faculty members and overseeing the college's ongoing financial stability.

"Under [retiring president] Dr. Carl Zylstra's leadership, Dordt is in a wonderful place now," said president-designate Hoekstra. "The core of our educational mission will always be to glorify God as a distinctively Christian, operationally excellent college that attracts quality faculty members, eager students and enthusiastic supporters."



While a commitment to Dordt's historical roots and an understanding of current strengths was important, the board was also looking for innovation. Vander Kwaak noted, "Dr. Hoekstra's track record of leading organizations with a blend of excellence and creativity – in both education and business – made him a compelling choice."

Dordt College is one of five liberal arts colleges/universities (three in the U.S., two in Canada) which were founded by members of the Christian Reformed Church. Dordt began in 1955, initially as a two-year teachers' college. The college currently has 1350 students from 30 U.S. States, eight Canadian provinces and 15 other foreign countries. It has 80 full-time faculty members and a student-faculty ratio of 15:1.



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Scotland: Bibles and Gideons are 'homophobic' says gay police association

EDINBURGH (TCI) – Scottish police forces have been told not to accept a gift of free Bibles from the Gideons because the book "condemns homosexuality." The Bibles have been offered to Scottish police forces featuring each force's badge.

But the Gay Police Association (GPA) is against the move, and has issued a statement demanding that the forces refuse to be involved. In the past, the GPA has been in trouble with the authorities for making incorrect and misleading claims involving the Bible.

In 2006 the group was reprimanded for producing an ad featuring the Bible next to a pool of blood with the headline "in the name of the Father." The ad blamed religion, focusing

in particular on Christianity, for violent attacks against homosexuals. But the Advertising Standards Authority ruled that the ad was untrue, indecent and unsubstantiated.

The trade union UNISON has joined with the GPA in opposing the offer of free Bibles for Scottish police forces.

The Gideons say they want to offer Scottish police the Bibles as a "valuable guide to life." The group said it would provide Bibles that "can be offered to all members of the individual force, both serving police officers and civilian staff."

But the GPA insisted that to accept the Gideon Bibles would mean that those police forces would be "officially endorsing a religious book containing text which condemns homosexuality." UNISON agreed and asserted that "it is not the role of a police force ... to foist religious views on its staff."



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News

Dordt student to head to Olympics for ministry

SIOUX CENTER, Iowa (DC/CRCNA) – Dordt College third-year student Vero Visser spent last semester looking for internship possibilities in the field of digital media production. Her search led to an internship for this summer with an organization that she initially thought was helping to put on a small-scale, local, Olympics-type event in London, England.

Visser will be joining the Christian ministry One Sheep, an organization that takes its name from Christ's parable of The Lost Sheep. One Sheep will work in London during the games of the XXX Olympiad, held July 27-August 12. That will provide a huge audience for the ministry's outreach.

Visser admits that she is "not really a devoted Olympics fan." So she didn't realize at first that she had landed what many would consider the gig of a lifetime. "I didn't know that it was for the London Olympics," she said. She thought the ministry would be working at a parallel, small-scale event. Once she realized the true nature of the internship she began doing her homework. She wants to learn as much about the Olympics as she can before arriving in London.

The internship will allow her to explore the kind of work she hopes to pursue after graduating from Dordt. Visser, a native of Paraguay, is especially interested in using media to build relationships and understanding between cultures. "We are going to be conducting interviews with different people, producing video content, a daily blog and collecting stories to share Christ with the world," she said.

"I want to be able to go to different places and countries and get to know people from different cultures. And I want to be able to use the camera to tell their stories in the best way that I can.... I want to be able to use media to reach others for Christ, and to glorify him."

In addition to her classes at Dordt, Visser has been involved with Prairie Grass Productions, Dordt College's digital media production company. She also spent the last Christmas break in Mexico filming and interviewing people for a documentary film for Christian Reformed World Missions.



Ontario: Christian schools graduate will realize Olympic swimming dream

Marian Van Til, with files from KCC and OACS

OAKVILLE, Ontario – Tera Van Beilen, 19, graduated from King's Christian Collegiate (KCC) in Oakville in 2011 and is currently a student at the University of British Columbia. She first showed swimming talent at age nine during a summer Bible camp. At that time she was a student at John Knox Christian School in Oakville. In the 10 years since, she has worked hard to hone her swimming talent. In the process, she has been buoyed by her faith.

Last month Van Beilen found out just how much her long years of hard work at competitive swimming have paid off: she will represent Canada in the summer Olympics in Britain. A "stand-out performance" in the Olympic trials in Montreal gained her spots to swim the 100- and 200-metre breaststroke races in London. The Olympics open on July 27.

Tera's mother, Sharon Van Beilen, described the realization during the Montreal trials that her daughter would be going to the Olympics. "It's very emotional.



All the love and prayer: just to see how happy she was to turn around after the 100 and look above the clock and realize that she was going to the Olympics was just incredible."



To earn a spot in the 200-metre Olympic race, Tera bested both the current world record holder and world bronze medalist and posted

the second-fastest time in the world this year.

King's Christian Collegiate rejoiced in Tera's achievement, which was announced in mid-April at chapel and in a "good-news edition" of the school's *Herald* newsletter. Sharon Van Beilen works at the school as an administrative assistant and rental coordinator. She says the school community has offered Tera "great support." Throughout Tera's four years at KCC, teachers and staff worked to accommodate her hectic competitive swim schedule while not compromising her education. And they prayed for her. "Each one of them has been so excited for her and they've been following her swims throughout her career. They've helped her to keep her dream alive."

Grounded in Christ

Sharon Van Beilen speaks of the importance of her daughter's faith. "She's definitely stayed grounded, she knows who she is as a believer in Christ; she's kept a healthy perspective on sport and she knows that she's valuable whether she swims or not."

Tera has been known to pray with others before races. It's an opportunity to share her faith and give God the glory. "When you're given this recognition and this gift you think, 'Wow, what an opportunity to share your faith,'" her mother says. "I just pray that that continues and she stays close to God and keeps a healthy perspective on sport – in her own Tera way, to give God the glory."

Tera was scheduled to visit John Knox Christian School, and King's Christian Collegiate on May 7 and 8 respectively (which had not yet occurred at CC press time). Sharon said Tera would share her story and faith journey, looking at her "perspective of who she is as a Christian through it all."

KCC is an independent Christian high school which was founded in 1999. John Knox Christian School was founded by Christian Reformed Church members in 1959. Both schools are members of the Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools (OACS).

Parents, not states, have duty to educate children, Vatican reminds U.N.

NEW YORK (CCO) – At the United Nations on April 24, a Vatican delegation decried a "disconcerting trend" to "downplay the role of parents in the upbringing of their children, as if to suggest somehow that it is not the role of parents, but that of the State." The delegation was representing the Vatican at the U.N. Economic and Social Council's 45th session of the Commission on Population and Development.

The delegation noted that "the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) affirms that 'parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children' (Article 26, 3) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) affirms that parents have 'the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child' (Article 18, 1)."

The Vatican delegation noted that, "these principles bear particular import regarding all matters pertaining to children, including, for example, with regard to their access to, as well as confidentiality and privacy of, information, education and communication activities and services concerning their health and well-being, including in the areas of human love, human sexuality, marriage and the family."

The delegation also called attention to the 250,000 Catholic schools around the world that "assist parents who have the right and duty to choose schools inclusive of homeschooling, and they must possess the freedom to do so, which in turn, must be respected and facilitated by the state."

Cornwall, UK: Paganism to be taught in religious ed classes

CORNWALL (TCI) – School children in Cornwall, the southernmost county in Britain, are to be taught about paganism as part of their religious education classes for the first time. The controversial move means that the youngsters will be taught about pagan beliefs such as witchcraft, in addition to Christianity, Islam and Judaism.

The contentious requirements say that children should begin learning about standing stones like Stonehenge from the age of five. The requirements are set out in an agreed syllabus which was drawn up by Cornwall's religious education (RE) advisory group. The syllabus also says that when children reach the age of 11 they should begin exploring modern paganism in Cornwall.

Mike Judge, spokesperson for The Christian Institute, responded, "Religious education is squeezed already – there's barely enough time to cover Christianity and the other major religions. Introducing paganism is just faddish and has more to do with the political correctness of teachers than the educational needs of children." The Christian Institute describes itself as "a nondenominational Christian charity committed to upholding the truths of the Bible." It exists for "the furtherance and promotion of the Christian religion in the United Kingdom" and "the advancement of education."

Neil Burden, Cornwall Council's cabinet member for children's services, said that the move to teach paganism would give children "access to the broad spectrum of religious beliefs."



Modern pagans in Britain. Just last month, Druidry was recognized as an official religion in the UK.

Earlier this year it emerged that a church-going former mayor in Warwickshire who declined to take part in a Halloween event had been found in breach of equality rules for upsetting pagans. Tom Wilson, who is a member at Manor Court Baptist Church in Nuneaton, said he believed Halloween was a "pagan festival" and that he did not want to be associated with it. But his comments, in 2009, were attacked by pagans who complained to Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council.

The former mayor was officially reprimanded for the comments and instructed to make a written apology in the press.

Columns

Technically Speaking

Derek Schuurman



This year marked the 100th anniversary of the sinking of the Titanic on April 15, 1912, after it struck an iceberg almost 700 nautical miles from Halifax. Despite the passage of time, the story of the Titanic continues to captivate people around the globe. The anniversary has spawned renewed interest in the event, including memorial cruises to the disaster site. Fascination with the story has given rise to a variety of museums, exhibits and attractions, including a graveyard tour offered in Halifax. It has also inspired many books, folk songs and films. James Cameron's blockbuster film *Titanic* has been re-released in 3D and tells a love story set aboard the doomed ship.

What is it about the Titanic that 100 years later it still engages popular imagination? To be sure, it is a story of human tragedy, of poor judgement by some and courage by others. It seems to me that one particular aspect of this story is human hubris and technology. The Titanic was said to be an "unsinkable ship," but ironically it sunk on its maiden voyage after hitting an iceberg. Reports indicated that the ship was steaming too fast despite being warned about a pack of icebergs in the area. The warnings were disregarded since it was felt they posed no serious risk to such a great ship. Both human error and design issues contributed to the disaster. The construction of the Titanic included substandard bow rivets and the watertight bulkheads were not sealed at the top. After the iceberg was struck, five of the watertight compartments were breached and the huge boat began to sink. There were too few lifeboats aboard the ship, and of the 2,224 people aboard over 1,500 perished.

The Titanic disaster led to several changes in maritime technology. For instance, improvements were made to standardize procedures and systems for wireless maritime distress calls. Shortly after the Titanic disaster, the International Radiotelegraph Convention adopted "SOS" as the international maritime distress signal and recommended continuous staffing of wireless stations aboard ocean-going ships. An inquiry into the disaster led to new safety measures which included recommendations to ensure adequate numbers of lifeboats and international monitoring for the presence of icebergs in the North Atlantic.

Other disasters

Earlier this year, the Italian cruise ship the Costa Concordia struck a rock off the coast of Italy and partially sunk. Over 30 people lost their lives. Despite additional safety considerations, maritime accidents still happen. I recall a boat cruise on a lake with my family and my in-laws when an ominous storm suddenly developed. The experience became more surreal as music from the movie *Titanic* emanated from the boat's sound system while the boat surged through the stormy waves. Thankfully we returned safely, but situations like these can remind us how potentially vulnerable we are.

Despite rigorous reliability and safety considerations, failures still occur due to technology, human error or both. Most engineering students are familiar with the Tacoma Narrows Bridge of 1940, among the largest suspension bridges of its time and which dramatically collapsed a few months after completion (without loss of life). News of airplane crashes periodically enter the headlines. The space program also suffered a major setback when the space shuttle Challenger exploded shortly after lift-off back in 1986 due to a broken seal on one of the solid rocket boosters. And then there are nuclear disasters such as Chernobyl and Three Mile Island. More recently, the Fukushima nuclear plant in Japan failed despite redundant safety systems. The combination of an earthquake followed by a large tsunami led to major damage and an eventual meltdown of several reactors.

Engineers have a responsibility to design for reliability and safety, especially in situations where human lives are

Remembering the Titanic

at stake. But despite the most careful considerations, technology and people are fallen, and failures still occur. These risks can be exacerbated when combined with a posture of human hubris. A century later, the Titanic is still a powerful story in the hearts and minds of many people. Part of that fascination may be the jarring fact that an "unsinkable ship" actually sank, of human hubris, and the tragedy that resulted.

Dr. Derek Schuurman (dschuur@cs.redeemer.ca) is a computer science professor at Redeemer University College. Along with his wife Carina and their children, he lives in Hamilton, Ont.



The Titanic has become a symbol of technological hubris.

Principalities & Powers

David Koyzis



As a young man, I cut my political teeth on the Watergate scandal, which brought down a sitting president and led to the conviction and incarceration of several members of his administration. One of these was Charles Wendell Colson, known to everyone as Chuck. As Special Counsel to President Richard Nixon, Chuck Colson gained a deserved reputation for ruthlessness in the conduct of his office. Thus the announcement in 1973 that he had become a Christian was greeted with a general sense of disbelief by many who knew him. Could someone so thoroughly imbued with the ethos of Machiavelli suddenly take on the mantle of evangelist?

Yet Colson's conversion was the genuine article, and for the next nearly four decades he devoted his life to the cause of Christ in a very public way. After serving time in prison, he founded Prison Fellowship in 1976, an outreach program to prisoners and their families aimed at turning around lives that might otherwise be wasted within the bowels of America's criminal justice system. There were a number of elements in this ministry, including Angel Tree, which has enabled prisoners to give Christmas gifts and messages of love to their families on the outside.



Had Colson limited his efforts to assisting prisoners and their families, he would have been justly remembered for having performed a great work for the cause of the gospel. But he went beyond this, focusing further on the domestic justice system, political action and encouraging among ordinary Christians the cultivation of a biblical worldview. This made him a latter-day heir of William Wilberforce, Abraham Kuyper and Francis Schaeffer, three Christians whom he admired and whose efforts for the kingdom of God he sought to emulate.

Wilberforce, for whom the think tank arm of Prison Fellowship is named, was the great English statesman who successfully ended the slave trade, laying the groundwork for its eventual abolition in the British Empire just days before his own death in 1833. Kuyper, of course, needs no introduction to readers of *Christian Courier*. Schaeffer, who

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An enduring legacy: Chuck Colson (1931-2012)

along with his wife Edith founded I'Abri in Switzerland, authored several books from the late 1960s until his death in 1984 in which he analyzed art and literature with an eye towards discerning the underlying worldviews therein.

From my perspective, one of Colson's most significant contributions was to raise Kuyper's profile amongst North American evangelicals to an unprecedented degree. I first became aware of Kuyper's rich legacy at age 20 through a friend at a Christian university in the States. At that time Kuyper was not very well known outside of Dutch Reformed circles, but this is no longer the case, due in no small measure to Colson and more specifically to his one-time collaborator Nancy Pearcey, who once studied with some of my friends, former teachers and colleagues at the Institute for Christian Studies.

Controversy

Not surprisingly, Colson was no stranger to controversy. He was castigated for reviewing books and films in his broadcast Breakpoint commentaries which he had not actually read or seen. Such commentaries were apparently written by others for him to read over the air. Colson's prolific book output was aided by staff writers who, it was charged, did most of the work but for little or no credit. A dispute over who would receive top billing led to a break between him and Pearcey after their successful collaboration on *How Now Shall We Live?*, with Pearcey making not so veiled allusions to this episode in the final chapter of her own *Total Truth* a few years later.

Moreover, Colson sometimes made it seem that Christian political involvement was for the purpose of saving America rather than for being faithful to a God who sovereignly works out his purposes throughout the world. Like the Social Gospellers of old, he tended to confuse the cultural mandate (Genesis 1:26-28) with Christ's redemption of creation, a conflation with potentially troublesome consequences for an orthodox doctrine of salvation.

Nevertheless, Colson successfully built bridges of co-operation between evangelicals and Roman Catholics, along with his friend Fr. Richard John Neuhaus, who preceded him in death by three years. In this too he followed the example of his mentor, Abraham Kuyper, who forged an enduring political alliance with Catholics in the Netherlands a century ago.

One of Colson's final political efforts was undertaken with Princeton's Robert George, a Roman Catholic, and Beeson Divinity School's Timothy George, a Southern Baptist. This came to fruition nearly three years ago in the Manhattan Declaration, an effort to stake out biblical positions on abortion, marriage and religious liberty. I will take up this important document in a future column.

Reviews



London-based folk trio releases second full-length album

Walter Miedema

What is likely to first grab you on listening to Isobelle Gunn's music is the gorgeous, tight harmonies that their three voices produce. For, while the band jokes that many people come to their concerts expecting a lone female folk singer, Isobelle Gunn is a trio, made up of Jeremy Zeyl, Lara Schat-Zeyl and Leanna Zeyl. Jeremy has joked that you should never "start a band with

your wife and your older sister" but it seems to be working well for him. The trio has been singing together since 2006 and released a five song EP shortly after. The band takes its name from an 18th century woman who disguised herself as a man in order to get a job with the Hudson's Bay company. In their music they seek to emulate some of the toughness and drive of their namesake. Their sound falls within the folk genre and wanders into country territory from time to time all the while maintaining a closely-woven harmony.

Losing the Ground, which was recently released, is the band's second full-length album. The songs are personal, honest and heartfelt. Most songs are written in the first person, and even when a character narration is used (Elisha in "Into the Jordan") it feels metaphorical and universally applicable. The entire album takes on a confessional tone that allows the songs to address subtleties of relationships, be it romantic, between parent



and child, or most centrally with God.

The tone of this album is a clear contrast to their previous release, *Flesh on Steel*. Where *Flesh on Steel* saw the band adopting an edge and purposefully presenting songs that embodied some extremes in societal brokenness, *Losing the Ground* turns down the level of melodrama and brings the emotions and tension into a realm where listeners can empathize and place themselves in the narrative. Central to the theme of this album is the Christian struggle of learning how to discern and surrender to the will of God.

These feelings are clearly embodied in the album's title track. The narrator states that she is "Longing for more, struggling stuck between now and before." The song effectively uses the metaphor of God as water – a powerful force that is good but not safe in conflict with our stubborn human wills. "Into the Jordan," which continues the album's central theme, is a very personal interpretation of the prophet Elisha's struggle in 2 Kings 2 to embrace his calling by literally and spiritually assuming the mantle of Elijah. The first person narration and concise description in the lyrics of this song work well to create an atmosphere and again the listener is brought in.

"The Raven Flew" gives us another facet of a relationship with God. The song's inspiration from Matthew 7 is clearly felt in the metaphor of trees and fruit, but it also holds within it a space of desperation of a narrator that feels that he has failed and will continue to fail in his practice of discipleship. The chorus sums up the failed character of the narrator "Hey, instead of wasting time / I smell bad fruit down the line / I'd give you names, give you a kiss / If you'd take me off your list." It suggests that the only true betrayal is giving up on God, and brings up allusions not only to Matthew 27 but also to the parable of the talents and the betrayal of Judas. This is a beautifully tight and rich bit of lyric writing. The theme of human failing in relationships with God is also present in "Blood Stained Town," which uses the nails in the hands of Jesus to dwell on the tension between our forgiveness through the sacrifice of Christ and our sinfulness which required the sacrifice in the first place. Similarly, "Broken Home" cleverly uses the metaphor of Christ living in us through the Holy Spirit in a heart felt plea for forgiveness and the nearness of Christ's presence. "Agnus Dei" adds one facet of expression to the relationship by simply being a gorgeous harmonious expression of full out praise. "Everlasting Peace" continues the theme of praise in a more quiet vein with gentler vocal qualities and nature-based metaphors.

"Melt My Heart", "Stone Castle" and "Wanting" are all romantic expressions that anchor themselves in Isobelle Gunn's warm harmonic sound. The metaphors present in these songs in combination with the rich expansive harmonies give a sense of suspended time that is perfect for their romantic subject matter. "Wanting," with its slightly cheeky ending, is particularly riveting as it is recorded live. "This Goodbye" is inspired by a time when Jeremy and Lara needed to leave their young son with his grandparents for a few days. It combines the love of a parent with memories of childhood and uses it to reflect on the nature of love, specifically the love of the Good Shepherd.

Losing the Ground is an album that requires and bears repeated listening. The harmonies will hook you, but the lyrics will lead you to listen again. ➤

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Matins / Vespers
by Parachute Band
(2011 Parachute Music)

A modern twist on the old canonical offices

Nick Schuurman

Parachute Band version 1.0 was formed in 1995 to lead worship at Parachute Festival, an event put on in New Zealand by an organization called, you guessed it, Parachute Music (I give them credit for consistency at least, and not being one of those bands that tries a little too hard to come up with a clever and original title). What started out as a one-time commitment eventually became a full-time gig. The first generation of the band, lead by Wayne Huirua, Libby Huirua and Chris de Jong, went on to record seven studio albums, tour internationally and be recognized for numerous awards. In 2006, the original crew called it quits, and the project was taken over by an entirely new set of members. Omega Levine, Sam de Jong, Jeremy Gregory, Callum Galloway, and Elliot Francis have since been the driving force behind Parachute Band, having, prior to *Matins / Vespers* recorded three additional albums – *Roadmaps & Revelations*, *Technicolor* and *Love Without Measure*.

Matins / Vespers, their most recent effort, is both a double album and a concept album. The group explains that it "combines the exciting exploration of Parachute Band's sound with a nod to the ancient rhythms of worship ... a modern twist on the old canonical offices." Those canonical offices are *Matins*, the practice of morning prayer, and *Vespers*, its evening equivalent.

Musically, *Matins* is a tightly produced, upbeat collection of songs for corporate worship, packed with punchy, electronic influence. *Vespers*, on the other hand, is an introspective, instrumental album with sparse piano and swelling ambient melodies. The two complement each other well, and give a unique sort of space to the dynamics of the human spirit.

Omega Levine, the band's front man, spits out vocals with a unique voice that seems to almost tremolo at times. "Keep the Fire Burning," an anthemic cry of faith worn thin, and "The City of the Lord," a stripped down song pulled straight from the Psalms particularly stand out.



While all the production and electronic engineering make for ear candy – especially for this most recent generation of Christians, raised musically on the likes of Katy Perry, and often more fluent in the language of Top 40 than that of the Psalms – I wonder if it could detract from the bands' intentions.

How does a multi-layered, effects-laden MP3 translate to the hour-or-so when we get together Sunday morning? For an increasingly digital cohort, in which practices like that of congregational singing, hospitality, tithing and breaking bread together at the communion table are replaced with sermons downloaded to podcast playlists, conferences streamed to laptops and quasi-spiritual conversation over Facebook chat, it makes sense. Maybe this is, in part, another example of worship made individual and entertaining?

I appreciate the concept of an ambient worship album, but I am not sure that more noise is what we need. The band's intention, of course, was that the sparse music would serve as a helpful backdrop to times of personal prayer and devotion. And I am sure that it has. The trouble is, what we really need, in our solitude, is silence. And silence doesn't sell. Nobody goes to a record store to purchase a blank CD. Being stripped of noise and distraction causes us to be confronted with what we've been carrying inside. "When we are invited to move from our noisy world into this sound-filled silence," wrote Henri Nowen, the late Dutch priest and author, "we often become frightened. We feel like children who see the walls of a house collapse and suddenly find themselves in an open field, or as though we have been violently stripped of our clothing, or like birds torn away from their nests."

Despite all of this, and all of my cynicism, Parachute Band is doing good things, playing music for people gathered with desire to worship, and making God-centred albums for a self-centered world. Most readers would appreciate *Vespers* more than *Matins*, but both are worth a listen. ➤

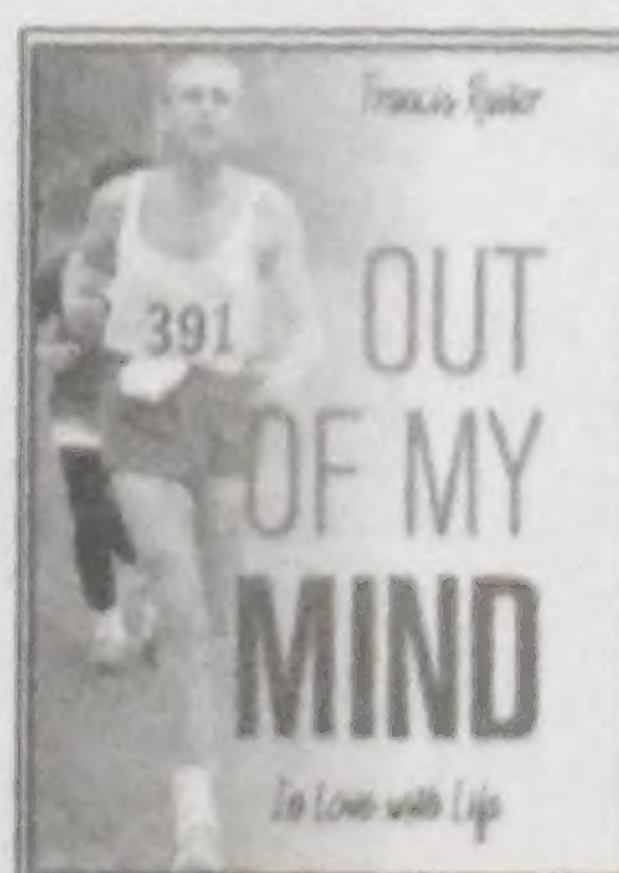
Nick Schuurman (reviews@christiancourier.ca) is CC's reviews editor.



Francis Ruiter, author of "Journal of a Dutch Immigrant" introduces his second book,

Out of My Mind: In Love with Life

Francis continues to recount stories of his past. He reflects on life's hopes and fears, sorrow and joys. In his final entry, "Facing Darkness," the author relates his confrontation with, and emotional triumph over, a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease. This book also includes some interesting "Poetry". Francis' books are available in Christian Book stores and in Chapters and Indigo stores or it can be ordered on-line at Amazon.ca. Email Francis at: francisruiter@shaw.ca



Features

Battling infertility: three couples' stories of hope

Linda Jonasson

Be fruitful and multiply

Fourteen years ago, I sat in church on Mother's Day as each mom received a flower. I so wanted to be a mom, but it just wasn't happening. It seemed like every woman was pregnant but me.

Married in our mid-20s, my husband Rob and I tried conceiving two years later. Within six months, I was pregnant! But at 12 weeks, I miscarried. I remember Rob holding my hand in the hospital, emotionally spent.

Determined to get right back on the horse, I was pregnant again six months later. We waited anxiously for the first trimester to pass, but at 10 weeks I miscarried again. It hurt no less the second time. Why me? I didn't drink, I didn't smoke, I ate healthy and I exercised.

The third time, I conceived within a year. Again, at 10 weeks, I miscarried. An ultrasound revealed a grapefruit-sized cyst on my ovary which the doctor tried to drain, but it was solid: I had endometriosis. After three nights in the hospital, I felt like I'd been run over by a truck. The fourth morning, I hobbled to the nurses' station to phone Rob, tears streaming down my cheeks. I felt so alone! But then the nurse wrapped her arms around me and together we watched the sunrise over Brantford. I knew there was hope.

My doctor referred me to an amazing specialist at McMaster Fertility Clinic. Given my diagnosis, the usual year-long wait was shortened to four months. Poked like a guinea pig, I had about 50 blood tests, low progesterone being my only deficiency. A procedure showed my Fallopian tubes were clear. Exploratory surgery revealed what Rob called the "Berlin Wall," a wall dividing the uterus which usually disintegrates in childhood.

Next, my specialist performed a three-hour surgery to remove my uterine septum and scarred ovary. I lost a lot of blood; the surgeon thought I might need a transfusion. However, I bounced back quickly and went home after three nights. I was back teaching within four weeks. Eighteen long months after starting treatment, I got the green light from the doctor to conceive.

However, two weeks later, someone called from Beginnings Adoption Agency. "Are you still interested in a baby?" I jumped so high I almost hit the ceiling! On Dec. 9, 1998, a bouncing baby boy arrived whom we named

Thomas. We were ecstatic to be first-time parents! Yet we were anxious, relying heavily on God's strength to get us through the adoption process. We continued trying to conceive, meditating on Scripture: "Be fruitful and multiply."

When Thomas turned four, I was stunned to find out I was pregnant (my home pregnancy test had been negative). The specialist examined my ultrasound and announced: "This baby's a keeper." Nonetheless, I held my breath for nine months. Our church prayer group prayed for me faithfully and week by week I started to take deeper breaths. In July 2003, I gave birth to a healthy baby girl named Jacqueline!

Now, on Mother's Day, I accept that flower with joy in my heart with my two children on either side of me.

God makes all things beautiful in his time

Nicole worked in a downtown office, watching wistfully out the window everyday as she saw teen moms walk by pushing strollers with cherub-faced babies inside. She ached to have a child, but after four years of trying she and her husband still had no babies.

At 24, *Nicole married *Vince, a 28-year-old man with brown hair and a winsome smile. Two years later, the couple decided to start a family, but were unsuccessful after a year of trying. Nicole wondered if her irregular periods contributed to her infertility.

Nicole visited a gynaecologist who put her on Clomiphene to help her ovulate. Thermometers and urine samples became standard in Nicole's life as she had to take her temperature five days a month and graph the results to find out when she was ovulating. Each month, the doctor gave her a pregnancy test; each month, it came back negative.

That is until a year had passed: she started what she thought was a normal period only to find out she had been pregnant, but was miscarrying. She was devastated! Her specialist then upped her Clomiphene dosage, an expensive drug for which they had no coverage. She found comfort when she picked up her prescription, though, when her pharmacist said, "I want you to know that I've been praying for you."

Nicole and Vince were sent to the McMaster Fertility Centre for more tests. In the meantime, the couple got on three adoption waiting lists. Nicole found solace in God's Word. She remembers a song that she was teaching as a Calvinette counsellor with the line: "In his time, in his time, God makes all things beautiful in his time."

The couple got a surprise phone call from the adoption agency asking if they were interested in a baby. A trusted couple suggested that they fast and pray about their decision. Nicole said, "I closed my eyes, opened my Bible and placed my finger on a verse - my finger was on Luke 1:41: 'the baby leaped in her womb.'" Nicole and Vince decided not to adopt.

Nicole found out she was pregnant six weeks later! She gave birth to a healthy baby girl eight months later. Taking her for walks in her new stroller, she cherished the time with her new baby. The couple returned to McMaster three more times for treatment and three more times Nicole brought the baby stroller out and placed a newborn inside.

However, God had not finished with Nicole! She was surprised when she found out that she was pregnant naturally and delivered not one, but two more healthy babies, the last one in her early forties! The fact that Nicole was more fertile in her older years made her comment: "God, you have a funny sense of humour!" Although Nicole has now retired the stroller for good, she will never forget those baby years. She is enjoying watching her six children grow up, all in God's time.

He gives the childless woman a family, making her a happy mother.

Andrea Vanderkooy, an x-ray technologist with dark blond hair and hazel eyes, sat in the home of her next-door neighbour, sipping tea and staring at the pages of a scrapbook full of baby photos. She so longed to fill up her own scrapbook with baby photos, but she and her husband John had tried to conceive for a year and a half without success.

Living in Barrie, Ont. at the time, 30-year-old John and 27-year-old Andrea sought help at a fertility clinic. A test revealed that their chances were low of conceiving a baby naturally. They went ahead with artificial insemination, which failed.



John and Andrea Vanderkooy with sons.

After hearing her neighbour's story, however, Andrea gained enough confidence to go ahead with IVF. Fertility treatment can be a lengthy, complicated process and the couple had to stay focussed on their goal. They made having a baby their top priority, switching their work shifts to accommodate the appointments. A scary part of the process was facing the possibility that they could spend a lot of time and money (10,000 to \$12,000 per cycle of IVF) without any guarantee of a baby.

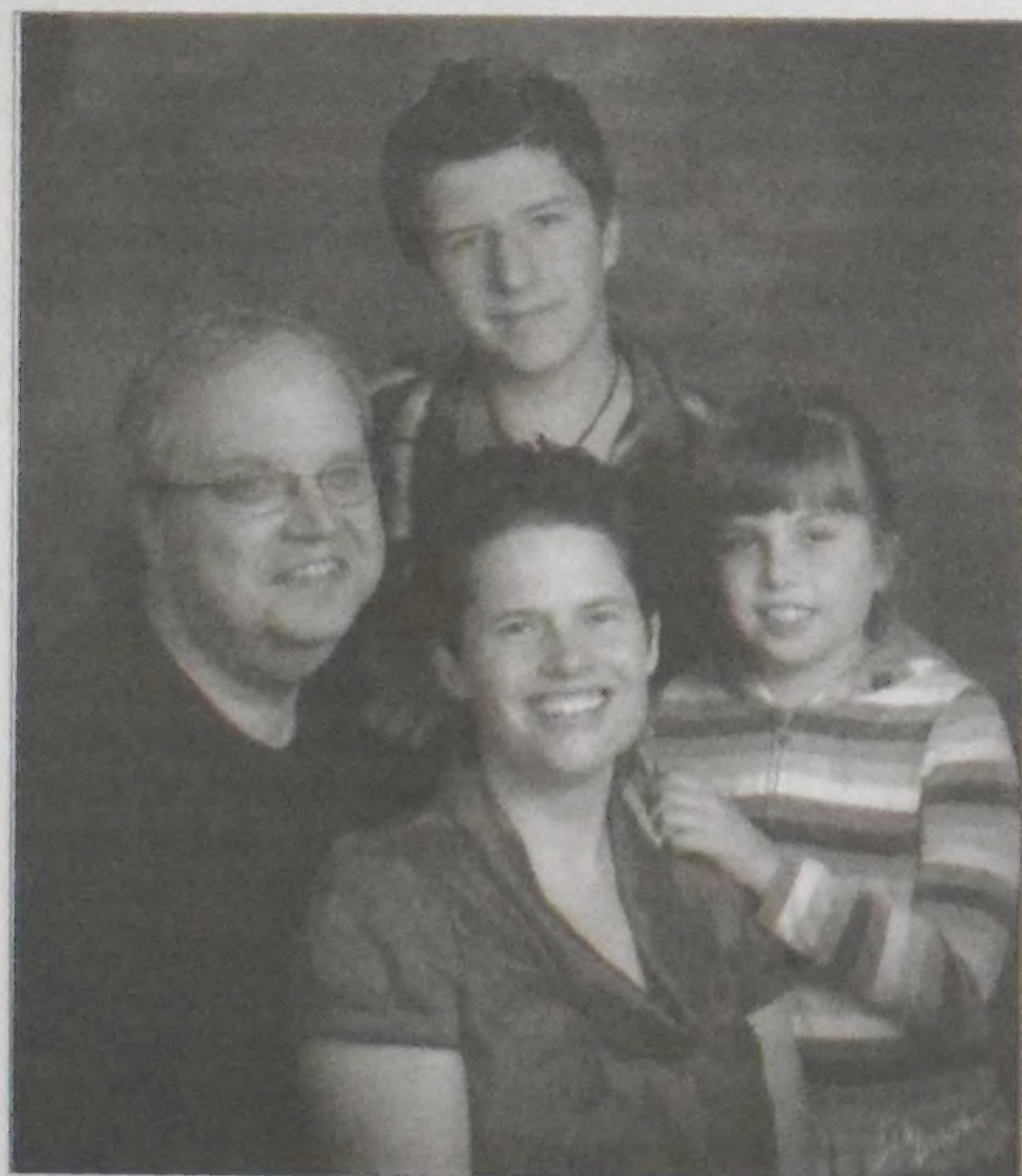
In their journey, they were surprised to find out how common infertility is. They relied on the support of their neighbours who had shared freely about their own infertility journey. After their first attempt at IVF, Andrea found out she was expecting and she gave birth to a healthy baby boy!

When asked what advice she and her husband have for infertile couples, they have these recommendations: seek treatment as soon as possible because your success rate is better when you are young; check out your health benefit coverage; keep receipts for income tax purposes; ask the potential grandparents or other relatives for financial help; and talk to other couples who have succeeded with IVF.

Their neighbours gave them a useful tip: reserve a hotel beside the fertility clinic the night before the procedure so as not to worry about parking and traffic on the appointment day. And don't forget to laugh! Their neighbours shared funny anecdotes about the ups and downs of infertility.

The Vanderkooy's added to their family with the birth of a second son through IVF. Now Andrea spends her evenings cutting and pasting her baby photos into her own scrapbooks, while her toddler sleeps in his bedroom his walls covered in finger paintings and her baby dozes to the sounds of his musical mobile. She is a happy mom!

*Nicole and Vince are assumed names to protect their privacy.



The Jonasson family.

Linda Jonasson is an elementary school teacher and writer. She lives with her family in Brantford, Ont. and attends Hope CRC. She blogs at alinefromLinda.blogspot.com



Features

One in six Ontario couples struggles with infertility

Linda Jonasson

With infertility rates rising in recent years, more and more couples are seeking help for the problem. Doctors say that because many couples wait longer to have children, they are less fertile. Sexually transmitted disease rates have risen and can contribute to infertility. Drugs, whether prescription or recreational, also contribute to infertility. Many women take the Pill for several years before trying to conceive and it takes time for their reproductive system to kick in again once they stop taking it.

There are various ways to treat infertility. Doctors toss around acronyms like AI, IUI and IVF. What are these procedures? Here's a FAQ about in vitro fertilization and other forms of assisted reproductive technology.

1. What is infertility?

Infertility is when a couple can't conceive after one year of unprotected sex. It can also refer to a woman who conceives, but has recurrent miscarriages.

2. What is secondary infertility?

Secondary infertility occurs when a woman has a successful first pregnancy, but cannot conceive and/or carry a second pregnancy full term.

3. What is sub-fertility?

Sub-fertility is the diminished ability for a couple to reproduce. In the past, doctors wanted to put women in one of two categories, fertile or infertile. However, many women fall into the sub-fertile category and with medical assistance can still have a healthy pregnancy. For instance, the doctor was shocked to find out that I had endometriosis because I had already conceived three times; however, there are varying degrees of endometriosis causing varying degrees of infertility.

4. What is sterility?

Sterility is the complete inability of a couple to conceive or produce an offspring.

5. What causes infertility in women?

A woman may have blocked Fallopian tubes, or she may have a disease called endometriosis where she bleeds outside the uterus during menstruation causing scar tissue.

6. What is endometriosis?

Endometriosis is a painful, chronic disease that affects 6.3 million women and girls in the United States, one million in Canada and millions worldwide. It occurs when the tissue lining the uterus (endometrium) is found outside the uterus, often on the ovaries, Fallopian tubes or abdominal muscles. This misplaced tissue develops into growths which bleed monthly with the menstrual cycle, but have no way of leaving the body. They can cause pain, scarring, infertility or bowel problems.

7. What causes infertility in men?

Twenty years ago, Danish scientists conducted a study showing that men from Western countries were slowly becoming infertile. In the 1940s, the average male sperm count was 100 million cells per millimetre of semen, while today the average count is 60 million cells.

Scientists have named several reasons that the Western male's sperm count is so much lower today. Firstly, excessive laptop computer use can lower the count due to the heat being emitted. Secondly, men who keep their cell phones turned on while in their pockets or clipped to their belts might be harming their sperm production due to the phone's radiofrequency electromagnetic waves.

Thirdly, men on blood pressure, heart condition or depression medication may become impotent. Doctors recommend possibly switching to another drug with fewer side-effects. Fourthly, environmental toxins and food additives can lower a man's sperm count. If the man was exposed to dioxins while in his mother's womb, that may also play a role. Finally, physical problems like varicose veins in the scrotum, genital injuries or defects, prostatitis or hormonal disorders can all affect a man's fertility.

8. What tests do doctors administer to diagnosis infertility problems?

Women usually have several blood tests, including some to determine hormone levels. They often take their temperature each month to determine when they are ovulating (temperature peaks). They may have a hysterosalpingography in which dye is injected into the Fallopian tubes to see if they are blocked. They may have a pelvic ultrasound to detect cysts. They may have a laparoscopy, a minor surgery where a tiny hole is cut below the belly button to explore the pelvic area for problems (for example, uterine septum). They may also be given a test for thyroid function. A Thyroid Stimulating Hormone test (TSH) is used to detect if a woman's thyroid levels are in balance. Undiagnosed or untreated thyroid disease can prevent conception or cause recurrent miscarriages. An FSH test is a blood test used to detect the amount of Follicle Stimulating Hormone in the bloodstream. A Clomid Challenge Test evaluates the female pituitary hormone levels by administering the drug Clomid to find out if the woman has a decreased ovarian reserve (chances for conceiving). Men may undergo blood tests, sperm count or motility, sperm DNA integrity assay, antisperm antibodies. For IVF candidates, blood tests are administered for Hepatitis B surface antigen, Hepatitis C antibodies, syphilis and HIV.

9. What treatments are available to infertile couples?

AI, or Artificial Insemination, involves fresh sperm or previously frozen sperm which is placed in the cervix, also called intracervical insemination (ICI).

IUI, or intrauterine insemination, is when sperm is washed and injected into the uterus.

IVF, or in vitro fertilization, is when an egg is fertilized by sperm outside the body in a Petri dish. The fertilized egg is transferred to the uterus with the intent of a successful pregnancy. Louise Brown, born in 1978, was the first successful IVF or "test tube" baby.

10. What types of IVF are available?

Natural IVF involves retrieving an egg during ovulation and placing it in the uterus.

Mild IVF involves a small dose of an ovarian stimulating drug taken for two to four days. The sperm and egg incubate in a Petri dish for 18 hours. However, if the man has a low sperm count or poor sperm motility, the egg will incubate in a growth medium for 48 hours.

Ovarian Hyperstimulation involves the injection of drugs called Follicle Stimulating Hormones (FSH) into the woman's body to stimulate multiple follicles of the ovaries, usually for a 10 to 14 day cycle.

11. What are the most recent success rates for IVF in Canada?

The 2011 Statistics available from ivf.ca indicate that Canadian Fertility Clinics have the following live birth rates as the result of in vitro fertilization:

40 percent (women under 35)

29 percent (women 35-39)

12 percent (women 40 and up)

The success rate continues to rise as doctors and scientists learn more about the procedure.

12. Does OHIP cover IVF costs?

In 1994, the Ontario Medical Association and Ontario Ministry of Health agreed to fund 3 fresh cycles of IVF for women who were under 40 years old and had both Fallopian tubes blocked. Many women do not fall into this category, however. Furthermore, certain expenses remained uncovered by OHIP including: certain drugs, lab services, assisted hatching, embryo freezing, ICSI and TESE.

As of 2012, with the infertility rate so high, some couples are lobbying the government to fund all infertile couples. One IVF treatment usually costs about \$10,000.

13. Where can infertile couples find help?

- Infertility Awareness Association of Canada (iaac.ca) This website provides a list of fertility clinics and infertility information.
- Fertility Clinics of Canada (familyhelper.net) This website provides fertility clinics and information.
- Beginnings Family Services, Hamilton, Ont. (beginnings.ca) This agency, started by the CRC, provides infertility counselling, adoption services and embryo adoption.
- Conceivable Dreams: OHIP for IVF Coalition (conceivabledreams.org) This coalition is lobbying the Ontario government to fund IVF treatment.

14. What Christian resources are available about infertility?

- *Infertility: Finding God's Peace in the Journey* by Lois Flowers. A biblical treatment of infertility that appeals to the mind rather than the heart of the reader.
- *The Infertility Companion: Hope and Help for Families Facing Infertility* (Christian Medical Association) by Sandra Glahn. Part almanac, part dictionary, part personal testimony examining the issues of infertility including the bioethics of the procedures.
- *Water from the Rock: Finding God's Comfort in the Midst of Infertility* by Donna Gibbs. A How-To Manual for navigating the grief of infertility, offering physical, emotional and spiritual tools to cope.
- *Hannah's Hope: Seeking God's Heart in the Mist of Infertility, Miscarriage and Adoption Loss* by Jennifer Saake. An exploration of Hannah's life and the author's infertility experience and advice.
- *Empty Womb, Aching Heart: Hope and Help for Those Struggling With Infertility* by Marlo M. Shealesky. This is like a "Chicken Soup for the Infertile Soul."
- *A Grief Observed* by C.S. Lewis. This is not a book about infertility, but a great read about grief vis-à-vis one's relationship with God. It may be helpful for couples who have suffered miscarriages.

Websites:

- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/infertility
- health.gov.on.ca
- rightdiagnosis.com
- ivf.ca
- endometriosisn.org
- naturalnews.com/026509_laptop_fertility_health.html
- naturalnews.com/029185_male_infertility_sperm_count.html

Linda Jonasson is an elementary school teacher and writer. She lives with her family in Brantford, Ont. and attends Hope CRC. She blogs at alinefromLinda.blogspot.com



Features

blog: (n) short for weblog, a website containing an online journal with reflections, comments and links. *Christian Courier* gives you a glimpse into current Christian thinking by presenting excerpts from a variety of interesting blogs. Blogs are usually free-association, occasional, off-the-cuff and may not conform to the standards of print publication.



Caryn Dahlstrand Rivadeneira is a sought-after writer and speaker. She's the author of two books – Mama's Got a Fake I.D. (WaterBrook Press, 2009) and Grumble Hallelujah (Tyndale House, 2011) – and the former editor of Marriage Partnership, Christian Parenting Today and Gifted for Leadership, all parts of Christianity Today International (CTI). Caryn continues her role with CTI as a Regular Contributor to Kyria, Gifted for Leadership and the HerMeneutics blog.

Caryn has written dozens of magazine articles, her work appearing in such publications as Christianity Today and Neuc. She is a regular contributor to Think Christian. Caryn is co-founder of Redbud Writers Guild. She and her Mommy Revolution blog (themommyrevolution.com) co-founder, Carla Barnhill, were columnists for Today's Christian Woman magazine. Visit Caryn at carynrivadeneira.com.



Did the demons really win?

Feb. 20, 2012

I had wondered why the death of Whitney Houston struck me so. Why the news of her being found dead in a Beverly Hills bathtub hit me so hard. After all, I didn't know the woman. Beyond that, I'd never been the world's biggest Whitney fan. Not even back in the day. Even when the 13-year-old me danced around my room and sung along with "How Will I Know," I didn't dance or sing with the same verve that I did, say, when it was Madonna or Cindy Lauper.

That said, while I've never been a huge fan of Whitney the Pop Star, I am a big fan of Whitney the gospel singer. I'm not ashamed to admit that the soundtrack from *The Preacher's Wife* – a movie in which she also starred – is among my favourites. And I'm really not ashamed to admit that I wore that record out during some difficult times in my life. Even still – when I'm having a hard time – I'm known to queue up Whitney singing "I Go To The Rock" or "Hold On (Help Is On the Way)" or even "He's All Over Me" and sing and swing in the sweet promises of those songs.

I'm pretty sure this brings me to the real reason for my grief over Whitney's death. We all knew of Whitney's troubles, her "demons," as they're being called. And yet when I'd hear her sing, "When all around me is sinking sand / on Christ the solid rock I stand" or "Say don't you worry, no don't you fret/The Lord has never, never failed you yet," I heard a woman who knew to whom she could seek in the battle with those demons. Because I knew of her trials and her faith, I heard her pain and her hope in her music. And in that, I – and certainly many others – found hope in my pain too.

So when news of her death came, that hope felt dashed. Because with that news came the realization that sometimes our demons win. This is news that people of faith never want to hear. Or even admit.

And yet, we see it play out all the time. When we struggle – or someone we love struggles – with addiction or mental illness or some other "demon," we pray and we hope. That God will deliver. That healing will come. That in our weakness, God's strength will be found. That it will be enough to overcome. That this will be yet another one of those "I found Jesus and never took another drink" stories the church loves to tell. Those are good stories – great stories.

But many of us recognize that they are not always true stories. Or, at least, not complete stories.

Again, sometimes the demons do win. And it was with that thought, that discouragement, that I sank into some grief – for Whitney, for her daughter, for her mother, for those who loved her. But also for all of us who fight against forces or demons or whatever you want to call them that so strong they threaten to overtake our lives or the lives of those we love.

So I spent a few days angry at God – for not stepping in, for not healing the many faithful who are trapped by these forces. I stayed angry at God for allowing these demons to get the upper hand and to take away lives. For letting them win.

Until I realized they hadn't won. Not at all.

A simple check of Facebook on Saturday with a line about the "church happening" on all the major cable news channels alerted me to Whitney's funeral. I had hours of house-cleaning and party-prep ahead of me, so I lugged my laptop from room to room and kept her live-streaming services on in the background. Church was indeed happening. Gospel choirs sang; preachers preached; performers testified. While person after person eulogized Whitney and shared memories or songs,

behind each was the story of a troubled woman who loved and was loved by God.

People can criticize that we spend too much time gloating over the lives of the rich and famous, that in televising a pop icon's funeral we're doing a disservice to, say, those service men and women who've given their lives for this country, and they may be right. But all I know is that this weekend – the good news and redeeming love of our Lord was broadcast around the globe. Who knows how many millions of people – trapped by their own demons – heard for the first time that God loves them too. That there's nothing they can do that can separate them from that love.

It's still a difficult thing to understand why God steps in and heals and rescues some from their demons and seems to let others succumb. We don't, we can't, know. But this weekend, I moved from being angry at God for not rescuing us all and letting the demons win and joined with those at Whitney's funeral who exalted Jesus even as they wrestled with the circumstances of her life and death.

The truth is: the demons didn't win. Though they'll keep fighting, they never do. They'll never really win. It's just as we've been told. They nip at heels – and cause plenty of us to trip and fall hard – but one day, their heads will be crushed. All lives forever free of their traps and grips.

Because even in times when it seems he's failed us, our God is at work, answering prayers and rescuing the faithful.



Hard to complain

Dec. 1, 2011

Most of the reviews for *Grumble Hallelujah* have been quite good. I've loved the emails and messages readers have sent and the kind words friends have shared. So nice to know that something I worked so hard on and poured so much heart, mind and soul into is being well-received.

But of course, not every review has been kind. Not every word said about me or my book has been favourable, but that's okay. As my mom always said, "To each his own." [Quick note: The saying loses something when I make it gender inclusive. So I didn't...]

Except that yesterday, I read the second review of my book in which I was accused of being "spoiled" and "whiney." I believe the woman also called me shallow. Again, to each her own. But what bugs me so much about these words being used against me is that I cop to these very things in the book.

I write about how I feel guilty because the things that made me grumble my hallelujahs are no doubt "first world" problems. I understand that what I lament is nowhere close to the despair that reaches God's ears from around this globe.

But I also write how afraid I've been to share my struggles because of my fear of being called "whiney" or "spoiled" or "shallow." And I write specifically how Jesus has used the events that made me grumble to help me become less spoiled, less shallow and, well, actually more whiney. But still: it seems doubly mean to go ahead and harp on me for being this way, when I've confessed. When I've written that it scares me that this is how I will still be seen.

But alas. I'm a big girl. And I'm a professional. I know this is part of the writing life. Writers take risks when we share things – risks of being rejected, risks of being called names, risks of being misunderstood. It's why we get paid the big bucks, people. (If you consider one-third the minimum wage to be "big bucks," that is.)

But if I can offer a word to the wise (another saying I stole from my mom): When someone bares her soul, when someone offers a struggle, do like Jesus and come back with kindness (you don't have to like the book!). Don't come back with name-calling, with shaming. Instead, respond with love, with kindness, with gentleness. Let's not get into the habit of judging one another on the merits of our complaints.

Except for the few chronic complainers and whiners among us (ahem: anyone of my children on any given day), I believe complaining is hard for most of us to do. It's hard to tell others we hurt, we struggle, we suffer somehow for the very reasons I experienced in reading that review.

Christmas gift idea: How about this year we give others the gift of being a listening ear. That we hear each other out, without judgment and with lots of love and mercy.



Whitney Houston funeral program cover.

Columns

Intangible Things

Heidi Vander Slikke



Once upon a time I considered people over the age of 30 to be elderly. Over 50? That was positively ancient. Okay, it's true I was 15 at the time. Now two-thirds of my children are past 30 and 50 is just a memory for me (a fairly recent memory, of course). I'll admit my changing perspective on ageing probably has something to do with the fact that I'm growing older myself, but honestly, the seniors I meet today seem much more vigorous than those I knew so many years ago.



In February I attended the 95th birthday party of a family friend who lives in Holland Homes. Make no mistake, she is a remarkable woman. Her mind is sharp, her eyes are bright and she's still a snappy dresser. You have to speak loudly so that she can hear you, but she has a great sense of humour, loves to chat and is keenly interested in people.

However, what really encouraged me as we sat down for coffee and croquettes was that she was surrounded by a crowd of people just like her. Laughter and lively conversation filled the restaurant that Saturday morning. About 30 friends had gathered together for the celebration. Even the facility itself looked more like a holiday resort than a typical "old folks' home." Many of the residents there are active, reasonably healthy and have busy social calendars. The majority share their Dutch heritage, as well as the common denominator of their Christian faith.

These people have faces made beautiful by years of faithful living, learning to persevere through the tough times and trusting God to work for good through all of life's circumstances. They understand that who you are isn't about what you do, or how successful you are. These are men and women who have walked a long time with the Lord, through joys and sorrows. Some have buried their spouses; others endured tragic losses or severe hardships. Most put up with bodies and minds that used to be stronger and faster, hopefully compensated somewhat by the wisdom that only experience can bring. I meet people like this in church, at the grocery store, in my writers' group and pretty much everywhere I go.

I met more of them at the birthday party of another dear lady, an 87 year-old, a few weeks ago. She had prepared all the food for the

Party in the waiting room

festivities herself, including enough birthday cake to feed the houseful of guests she would receive that day. She greeted my in-laws and me with a warm smile and an energetic hug as we came through the back door of her immaculate bungalow.

Her daughter-in-law, a friend of mine, cheerfully served goodies to the mostly white-haired visitors in the living room. Someone once commented that when people get older, all they have to talk about is their aches and pains or the good old days. This group apparently hadn't heard that little bit of sagacity. They talked about politics, the weather, the high price of gas and what went on at church that week, among other topics.

Waiting to go home

As we sipped coffee from bone china cups and ate our "koek" with tiny forks, the birthday girl leaned over and told me of a recent social event where she was actually one of the younger guests. Many of those present were in their 90s. It reminded her of something her father-in-law used to say: "It comes to a point where life is like a waiting room. You look around and realize that one by one, we all get called home." She said this without a hint of self-pity or regret, just the confidence of stating an irrefutable fact.

That could be construed as morbid thinking, unless of course, one is a Christian.

Spurgeon writes that for those who, by the Holy Spirit, have an intimate knowledge of Christ as their Redeemer, "Death is no longer banishment, it is a return from exile, a going home to the many mansions where loved ones already dwell."

He likens the believer's life to a journey across the sea. "The distance between glorified saints in heaven and militant saints on earth seems great; but it isn't. We are not far from home a moment will bring us there. The sail is spread; the soul is launched upon the deep. How long will its voyage be? ... Listen to the answer. 'Absent from the body, present with the Lord.' Your ship has just departed, but it is already at its haven."

I tend to think of life as a training ground for eternity. Busyness gives me the feeling that I'm getting closer to my goal. But no one knows the number of days ordained for him or her. It isn't age that brings us into the waiting room. Apparently, it's not a bad place to be, depending on what one does with the time. Lifelong habits of daily prayer, Bible reading and fellowship not only continue there, in many cases they flourish.

And every now and then a party breaks out in the waiting room. Bring on the birthday cake!

Heidi Vander Slikke (hmvanderslikke@hotmail.com) lives in Harriston, Ont.

Artful Eye



Photos by Marianne VanderSpek.
Marianne is a farmer and photographer living near Florence, Ont.



My Daughter's Hands

When did you hatch these pink birds
that alight on everything in the house?
They land on power cords and houseplants,
perch between the window blinds.

At communion, I hold you on my lap
as I take a cup from the silver tray.
Every muscle in your body strains.
You want nothing more in this world,
love nothing as you love this purple vial.
Color swims there. Light bounces.
You whimper, stretch and shriek.

People turn. Yet I know the moment I say no
your world will begin to go wrong.
You will learn that most bright things
are never meant to be touched
and have purposes other than your joy.
You will learn the tension in my neck
as I shake my head to the beautiful movements
of your flesh. You will swim against
the current of my voice juttied with stone eyes.
And eventually, even when we embrace,
a curtain will fall between us
like the thinnest, coldest silk.

So child, take the cup and let it splash;
suck the sweet plastic and grin.
May your saliva roll down your chin and neck
like jewels, sparkle on your fingers
that have just this brief time
to fly over the world.



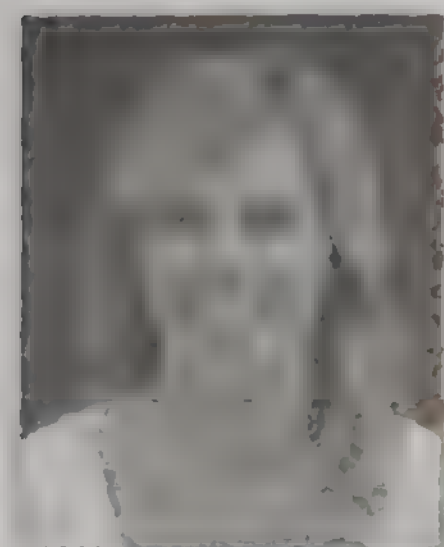
Tania Runyan is the author of *A Thousand Vessels* (WordFarm), *Simple Weight* (FutureCycle Press) and *Delicious Air* (Finishing Line Press), which was awarded Book of the Year by the Conference on Christianity and Literature in 2007. Her poems have appeared in many publications, including Poetry, Image and The Christian Century. She was awarded an NEA Literature Fellowship in 2011.



Columns

Roots and Wings

Emily Cramer



In the soft hours after my daughter was born (I, hazy with awe and the waning anesthetic, locked deep in her blinking grey eyes), something unexpected washed over me. It was the Priestly Blessing from Numbers; I had to work a little to draw up the right words: "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace" (6:25, NIV). Yes, that was what I wanted for this new little life, a blessing of peace and the laughing eyes of God upon her. I whispered it aloud into her half-shell ear then, and again every day since.

But maybe I wasn't really paying attention, even as the words issued from my own mouth. When we returned to normal life at home, I found myself exhibiting all kinds of paranoid behaviour; during our first trip to the grocery store, I raised the visor of her car seat when we were *inside*, stood between the grocery cart in which her seat was strapped and any stranger within a 50-foot radius, formed a mound of blanket to conceal her face. My husband raised an eyebrow. Does every new mother panic at the thought of exposing her child to the world? I didn't expect this.

When I told my sister about it, she was

The eyes of love



Words can hurt, as many children find out.

surprised. "I couldn't wait to show my babies off," she said, and that really made me worry about my emotional stability. Yes, there was the usual instinct to protect her physically, but part of my anxiety bloomed like a hot house flower in the total absence of danger. The best way I could explain it was to tell my husband that I didn't want her to be seen – to be critically appraised – by strangers. I wanted the only eyes that looked at her to be eyes of love.

In a recent article in the *Toronto Star*, a mother of mixed-race children wrote about her dismay at an experience her son had in his grade 1 classroom. Another little boy referred to him using the "P-word" as she called it, a derisive short form of "Pakistani." The mother was shocked that her small son had been the recipient of a racial slur, and it began a chain of events including a forceful letter to the school, a meeting with teachers, a school-wide cam-

paign for inclusiveness, and ultimately an apologetic discussion with the parents of the offending first-grader. Happily a lesson had been learned and all was put right in the end. And yet.

Teasing

Anyone who has been teased in their early years can tell you about the vulnerability of children. Fortunately or unfortunately – I'm not sure which – my daughter is unlikely to be the victim of racial discrimination in our geographical setting. But what about the other ways a person can be belittled: not thin enough, smart enough, beautiful enough? Not good enough at sports? Not suave enough with the opposite sex? And in subtler ways, especially for girls: not sufficiently self-demeaning, not tolerant enough of objectification? What about the words that broke me, stunted my soul growth, shaped my sense of self? Most slurs do not generate collective disapproval in the way that racism does. Imagine a school responding with gusto to a computer-geek slur? A pro-shy-kid campaign?

The point is that as long as my daughter is allowed to be anywhere other than locked under our stairs (my husband's joking failsafe) she will be vulnerable. I absolutely hate that. My every instinct is to tuck her under my wing, have her rec-

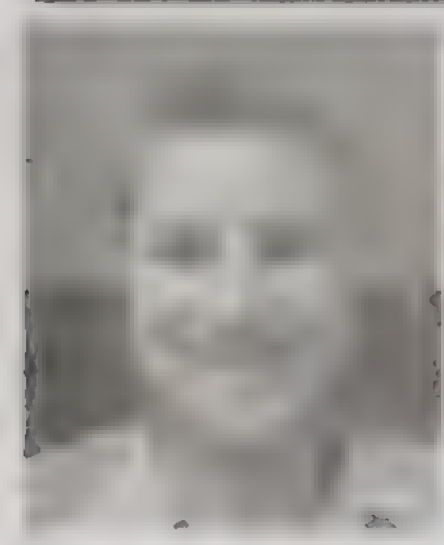
ognize her identity only in eyes that reflect joy, approval, pleasure, grace. And I hope the Lord has given me this strong instinct because my child is still very young and in need of my vigilance. There will be a time when I will have to release her into the world, just in small ways at first, and I will do my best to prepare her for the slings and arrows that may come. But I doubt I'll ever stop fearing her vulnerability.

Then, in the midst of my fearing, these words return to me: "the Lord make his face shine upon you ... turn his face toward you...." How could I have forgotten? The eyes that look at her *are* eyes of love. Beyond any love her father and I can give her, the Face that shines on her, the Countenance lifted to greet her *is* good, *is* loving, *is* radiant with unmerited grace in boundless measure. When she begins to question her identity, may those be the eyes she searches for an answer. And casting aside my fear and the scars of my own belittlement, may I learn to model the way for her, showing her where to look.

Emily Cramer lives in Barrie, Ont. with her husband and daughter and teaches in the Liberal Arts department at Georgian College. She is being dramatically confronted by Ann Voskamp's One Thousand Gifts

My Window Seat

Mendelt Hoekstra



The artists of Momentum Choir have made their statement. They want people to see them as who they "really can be."

Momentum Choir is a Niagara-region performance choir of more than 45 members, all of whom are good musicians and happen to have an intellectual disability. They are a highly disciplined and professionally facilitated group. Momentum performs approximately 10 times per year at different church services, conferences, concerts and events.

After a recent emotional performance during a Sunday worship service, a woman who looked to be over 60 came up to me with tears in her eyes. Women over 60 are unique creatures. It has been my experience that most women over 60 have much wisdom, and are willing to share. They are very honest with their opinions, and often less hesitant to speak their mind the older they get. This woman came up to me and grabbed my hands. She was clearly emotional. She said to me "Momentum did a wonderful job." I thanked her. She went on, "the song choice was exceptional and the kids were amazing." (In my mind I groaned – one of the Momentum singers is

See me as me

82 and this woman was calling her a kid). I thanked her again. She then went even further. "When all the wheelchairs rolled up to the front of the church, I expected nothing. I didn't expect to be entertained. I didn't expect to be emotionally engaged and I didn't expect to be moved." Wow, I thought, *that's some serious honesty*. "But I was!" she exclaimed. "I really was. I was brought to tears. I was moved and will never forget this." I thanked her for the third time.

I hesitantly shared this conversation with the choir members two days later during Tuesday's rehearsal. I was fearful that it might cause hurt feelings and bring up some painful emotions. I was right. And that was okay. After I explained what the woman said, I asked people to share how they felt upon hearing this. Responses came flooding out, bursting like a balloon: *That's okay, I'm confident. There is no difference between abled and disabled, we are all equal. I believe in myself. Some people don't know any better but I can dream. I will rise above bad stuff. I am reliable and trustworthy. If you can believe you can achieve. I am allowed to wish and take risks. I am not less than that woman and even though she may have a greater responsibility in life, she is*

not higher than me, we are both equal. (!) I have gifts that she just didn't notice yet. I like when people see me as me. I am just like that lady in one way; I want to make people happy. I am patient and want to make people see better.

When the last person spoke, everyone was smiling. And I had to remember to breathe. I was inspired and suggested that we write a song about this. It was a perfect recipe of passion, experience and wisdom. The song title became "See Me as Me."

SEE ME AS ME

I want to belong. I really believe.
I'm gonna inspire, the people to see.
To see me as I really can be.

Come and look at us in the eyes.
Are you ready to realize?
We will not compromise.
Momentum is on the rise ... Come
and see me as me.



I want you to see me as me.
I want to see what I can be.
My skills are now set free.
Momentum ability ... Come and see
me as me.

Let me tell you what I can do
I got this gift and it sticks like glue
I know that you will see, I'm gonna
OUTSHINE MY DISABILITY!

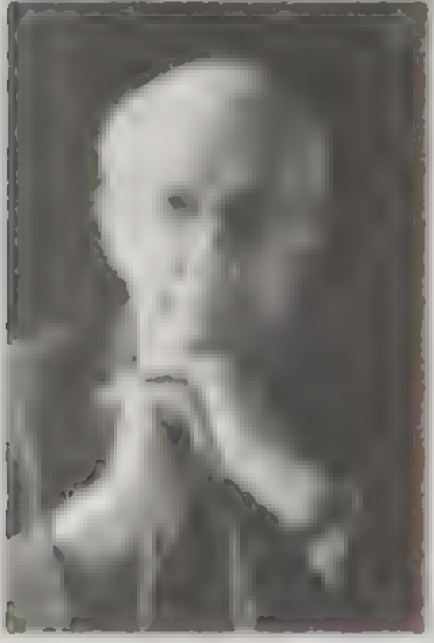
Momentum is going to perform this song for the first time at our year end concert. The advertisement for the concert went into the bulletin of the church where that conversation happened. I wonder if that woman will ever hear what she started

Mendelt Hoekstra (mendelt.hoekstrata@gmail.com) lives near St. Catharines, Ont

Columns

The Public Square

Harry Antonides



The so-called Arab Spring has not turned out well for the estimated 12 million Christians still living in the Middle East. This has become painfully evident in Afghanistan and Iraq, two countries

that were liberated from two different but equally murderous tyrannies. Instead of now enjoying the freedom to live, work and worship as they choose, Christians in these countries are again suffering under severe persecution.

The recently published annual report of the U.S Commission on International Religious Freedom names the following 16 countries as the "most systematic freedom violators in the world": Burma, China, Egypt, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Nigeria, North Korea, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, (north) Sudan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Vietnam.

Nina Shea, a tireless public defender of persecuted Christians and other non-Muslims, believes that Afghanistan also belongs in the ranks of the world's worst religious persecutors. For instance, the Afghan government has ordered the razing of that country's last remaining church after its lease was cancelled. And the Afghan constitution fails to protect the freedom of religion or belief. Instead, it contains a clause that all laws must be in accordance with Islamic law (sharia).



Iraqi Christians attend an Easter mass. The post-Saddam Hussein government has tolerated, perhaps even supported, attacks on Christians and their property.

Expatriate Afghans, on behalf of the persecuted Christians in Afghanistan, sent an open letter to the free world in June 2010 in which they pleaded for help because the government of that country is engaged in a "campaign to brutalize and eliminate its Christian citizens." The letter reports that Christians have been subjected to frequent searches of homes and businesses, and to arrests and torture in order to extract the names of Afghan Christian converts and the locations of secret Christian churches. The writers plead with the Body of Christ around the world for help in broadcasting the desperate plight of the Christians in that country.

Persecution elsewhere

Iraq's Christian population was once

Christianity is expelled from the Middle East

one and a half million, but is now reduced to fewer than 150,000 – although The Voice of the Martyrs puts that number at about 334,000. Tragically, the post-Saddam government has tolerated, perhaps even supported, the numerous attacks on Christians and their businesses, houses and churches. Writing in December 2011 in *American Thinker*, Michael Curtis said that in the last five years 18 priests and two bishops have been kidnapped. The archbishop of Mosul was killed in 2008. Since 2004 over 70 churches, 42 of them in Baghdad, have been attacked. In October 2010, 58 Christians were killed and others seriously wounded while attending the Syrian Catholic Cathedral in Baghdad.

Churches have been bombed in Egypt, Nigeria, Pakistan, Indonesia and the Philippines. In Pakistan, Asia Bibi, a Christian woman, is facing the death penalty for having "insulted" Islam. In Iran, Youcef Nadarkhani has similarly been condemned for the "crime" of becoming a Christian. In desperation to escape these horrific attacks, some Christians have converted to Islam. Curtis writes that in countries such as Syria and Egypt others have supported secular political groups in the vain hope of being protected. Above all, Christians have fled from these countries so that the Arab world – which is now home to very few Jews – is also becoming devoid of Christians. Hence this cruel slogan that makes the rounds in the Arab world: "First the Saturday people, then the Sunday people."

What drives the current intensified persecution of Christians in the Arab/Islamic world? The main reason is the radicalization of the Muslim world, accompanied as always, by hatred for the kafirs, the unbelievers. Perhaps the most important cause is a revival of the belief that Muslims have the duty to spread the rule of Allah, as embodied in sharia law, over the entire world.

The Grand Mufti's fatwa

Hence we should not be surprised that on March 20, 2012, the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, Sheik Abdul Aziz bin Abdullah, declared that it is "necessary to destroy all the churches of the region." His pronouncement was in response to a question from a Kuwaiti delegation about the place of Christian churches in Islamic countries.

The Grand Mufti explained that not to destroy the churches would be to approve them, which would be contrary to the prophet Muhammad who is recorded as saying (in the hadith): "Two religions shall not coexist in the Arabian Peninsula." In other words, the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia – who occupies a place of supreme authority in the Muslim world – has declared that the persecutors of Christians are justified in what they are doing.

Country Living

Meindert Vander Galien



You can probably name a few ridiculous gadgets and machines invented in recent years that were supposed to make life easier for us, but, in reality, ended up making simple jobs a lot more complicated.

Look at all the chiropractors that have set up a practice in the last 10 years. They're all busy and doing a great business because people aren't bending down and using their back muscles any more. When the out-of-shape folks do some physical labour, they have aches and pains and off they go to the chiropractor.

Last summer I was driving down a residential street in a city and saw trucks and equipment parked on both sides of the street. Right away I thought pavers were doing a driveway. But it was a landscaping company redoing a tiny front lawn of a house. I had to stop and watch the show. There was a truck and long trailer, a small loader tractor with a tiller on the back, a small tractor with a backhoe and a tractor with a street roller clean-up brush. Any dirt spilled on the pavement would be mechanically swept away. It used to be done with a stiff broom. I chuckled when I saw a little pull-type grass seeder.

As usual, there were men standing around. Back in the 1960s I worked in construction and landscaping, so it was interesting to see how

times have changed. All that equipment to do a tiny lawn was overkill. I suppose the homeowner couldn't get anyone to take the old sod off with a flat shovel, till or hoe the ground up a bit and re-seed it. Maybe the homeowner didn't know it could be done with far less fanfare. The job, including grass seed and fertilizer, could probably be done for \$500 if someone wanted to work using some old-fashioned tools. It would be interesting to see how much the modern landscaper charged.

I did landscaping over the years and always seeded lawns and spread fertilizer by hand. That skill was lost when someone invented grass seeders. I had a good chuckle the other day in a big box hardware store. For fun, I read the directions on a 30-pound bag of lawn fertilizer. It said to spread the fertilizer with their brand fertilizer spreader

me the price for that model is \$160,000. The tractor required to pull and operate it would cost over \$200,000.

There is a machine called a Bale Baron. It's an automatic bale packager that stacks and ties 21 small square bales. A Huron County farmer invented the machine a few years ago. It looks like a large square baler and pricey at around \$75,000.

The Bale Baron virtually eliminates all manual handling. The tied stack of bales is picked up with a front-end loader. The machine can pick bales off the ground and can bundle up to 600 bales an hour. What? Are we back to little square bales now? Or is it just another invention to keep people buying things?

Complicating simple jobs with machines

and to run the machine up and down the lawn and then go crossways. How ridiculous! If another brand spreader were used would it then have to be spread angle ways as well – maybe from corner to corner?

Take a good look at all the gardening and lawn stuff in the big stores. Do we really need all those toy-like things? What do people do when they have a little patch of lawn that's winterkilled and dead looking? Well, we know some folks call in a landscaper. Others have a small grass seeder in their garage, or they go and buy one. Maybe some day the spreaders or seeders will come equipped with a GPS? Sowing by hand has gone the way of the horse and buggy.

Oversized machines

I spent a day at the Ottawa Valley Farm Show in March and was amazed at the size of some of the machines on display. There was a sprayer with a 120-foot wide boom. A liquid manure tank on many wheels can hold 8,000 Canadian gallons. The size of the thing is unbelievable. There were two large machines displayed outside that I don't know what were for, and there was no sales person around to enlighten me.

How many farmers need a 30-foot merger for forage? A Kuhn machine displayed inside the building merges two 15-foot windrows. It's a big and wide machine and I suppose great if you have 500-acre fields. The salesman told



The Bale Baron in action. Just another invention to keep people buying things?

me the price for that model is \$160,000. The tractor required to pull and operate it would cost over \$200,000.

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Meindert van der Galien is a Renfrew area farmer and agricultural writer.

Further, why is it that even the Christian churches do not speak up loud and clear in defence of the long-suffering, desperate fellow believers in the Muslim world?

Harry Antonides (hantonides@sympatico.ca) retired as director of the former Work Research Foundation. He lives in Willowdale, Ont

Classifieds

Birth	Birthdays	Anniversaries	
<p>With joy and thanksgiving to our Lord, Steve and Lori Kloppe (nee Scholten) are pleased to announce the safe arrival of</p> <p>Michael Andrew Kloppe 8lbs 7oz on April 2, 2012.</p> <p>A baby brother for Ty and Jackson. Another little grandson for Jack and Theresa Scholten and Gerald and Marg Kloppe. Another great grandchild for Alice Van Gysse.</p>	<p>Happy 80th Birthday Jane Oegema On May 11, 2012 D.V., Jane will celebrate her 80th birthday. We pray that the Lord will continue to bless Mom.</p> <p>Margaret & John Zylstra Lucy & Fred Zylstra Bernie & Alison Oegema Evelyn & Tom Kaastra</p> <p>Love also from her growing family of 16 grandchildren and 5 great-grand- children.</p> <p><i>O clap your hands, all you people; Shout unto God with a voice of triumph! Psalm 47:1</i></p> <p>Address: Herman & Jane Oegema 16 Massey Drive St. Thomas, ON N5R 5M6</p>		
<p>Obituary - Correction</p> <p>Martina Sophia Van Egmond On March 21, 2012, the Lord called home our dear sister, Tina. Wim† and Mien Zandbergen. Janna and Geerlof† van Starkenburg Gerda and Henk† vander Mey Sophia and Chris Eyzenga Johanna and Andy Beimers Cora and Henk Rook Kees and Gretha Zandbergen</p> <p>Note: The names of Johanna and Andy Beimers were previously omitted</p>		<p>50th Wedding Anniversary 1962 – May 12 – 2012</p> <p><i>And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. 1 Corinthians 13:13</i></p> <p>With thankfulness to God, we are happy to announce the 50th wedding anniversary of our parents and grandparents:</p> <p>HANK AND GEORGINA VANDEZANDE (nee Barneveld)</p> <p>Congratulations, Mom and Dad! Thank you for your love for all of us and for being such strong examples of love and faithfulness.</p> <p>Elisabeth & Robert Enzlin, Chatham, ON Joshua, Micah, Samuel, Sarah-Grace Gina and Mark VandenDool, Jordan, ON Ariana, Adam, Dale Darren & Julie Vandezande, Pinckney, MI Jaedon, Jenna</p> <p>Home Address: 58 Woodland Ave, Chatham ON N7L 2S6</p>	
<p>For Rent</p> <p>1 Bedroom Apartment in St. Catharines, available June 1st. Clean, freshly painted one bedroom upper apt. with separate entrance, fridge & stove, free laundry facilities, off road parking in a quiet residential area will be available June 1st for \$650.00 + hydro. Approx. 5 minutes from Brock and Niagara College (NOTL Campus). Please email rnieuwold@becon.org or call 905 899-2261.</p>	<p>Happy 90th Birthday – May 30th Jenny Swytink</p> <p>With much love from your daughters, sons-in-law and grandchildren.</p> <p>Address: Shalom Manor 320 - 12 Bartlett Avenue Grimsby ON L3M 0A2</p>	<p>JOE AND HENNIE HILVERDA 1962 – May 19 – 2012</p> <p>Thankful for God's grace and faithfulness in our lives, we along with our children and grandchildren plan to celebrate our 50th wedding anniversary on May 19th, 2012 DV</p> <p>So many years together, so many blessings! Romans 8:28</p> <p>Lynne and Ron Smeding (Saskatoon, SK) Rachel, Alyssa and Dan Koster, Tyler, Curtis, Nathaniel Kim and Alan Price (London, ON) Rebecca, Clarissa Lisa Hilverda and Mario Figueiredo (Kitchener, ON) Mark and Melanie Hilverda (Kitchener, ON) Aleksandr, Allison, Emily</p> <p>Home address: 9 Valleyridge Trail, Guelph ON N1G 4A9</p>	

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Obituary

Christina Romyn (nee den Boer)

On April 18, 2012, Christina Romyn, formerly of Stratton Ontario, passed
away peacefully in Portage-la-Prairie at the age of 97.

Christina, or "Oma" as she was fondly called by many, is survived by her
daughters: Elsie Van Dyk, (George); Connie Bruinooge, Audrey Dalberg
(Norman); Tina Douma, Jacklen Laird, Joanne Romyn and Natalie Romyn,
sons Harry Romyn and Bill Romyn (Delores), 25 grandchildren and numerous
great and great great grandchildren and brother Pieter den Boer. She was
predeceased by her husband Willem, three sons, Cornelius, Cornelius
Willem, and Gerrit Romyn, her parents Aartje and Gerrit den Boer, three
brothers Cornelius, Jacobus and Gerrit den Boer, and three sons-in-law,
Daniel Bruinooge, John Douma and Terry Laird, one great-grandson and one
great-great granddaughter

Christina was born in Zwijndrecht, the Netherlands and immigrated to Portage-la-Prairie, Manitoba in 1950
with her husband and nine children; another daughter was born in 1952. The entire family worked hard
at a variety of jobs in Portage-la-Prairie until 1955 when they were able to purchase a farm in Stratton,
Ontario. Once again, the family worked hard and, in time, their fledgling farm became a successful dairy
farm. When Christina's husband Willem retired in 1974, they together travelled widely going from coast-
to-coast sight-seeing and visiting with their children and many grandchildren along the way.

Christina and her husband were active members of the Emo Christian Reformed Church. Christina had
a keen ear for music and, especially in later years, often played her mandolin at church functions. Her
children and grandchildren loved it when she played her mandolin and sang; most often her repertoire
was made up of the great songs of faith that had sustained her and which expressed her deepest wishes
for her family. Sunday evenings often found the family intensely engaged in playing board games and
ending with Christina playing her mandolin and she and Willem singing together. When Willem died in
1998, Christina continued her travelling and visiting family members and enjoyed a highlight return visit
to the Netherlands. In 2007, Christina moved to Portage-la-Prairie where she resided with her daughter
Tina until her death.

As family we both mourn her loss and give thanks for her long, well-lived life. A worship service
commemorating her life was held in the Emo Christian Reformed Church at 1:00pm on Monday April
23, 2012. Rev. Harold deJong officiated. In celebration of her life and in keeping with Christina's deeply
rooted sense of caring and compassion, donations may be made to the Christian Reformed World Relief
Committee c/o Northridge Funeral Home, Box 89, Emo, Ontario, P0W 1E0, in lieu of flowers.

Online condolences may be offered at www.northridgefuneralhome.com

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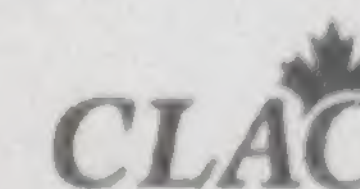
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Attention: Susan Salvati, ssalvati@clac.ca

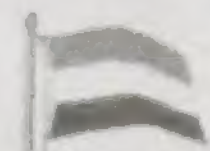
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Events/Advertising

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

May 12 The Liberation Choir and Collegium Musicum Male Choir will have their Spring Concert at the Covenant Christian Reformed Church in **St. Catharines**, located at 278 Parnell Road. The program consists of Classical, Sacred, Contemporary and Spiritual music. 7.30 pm Tickets \$15.00 at the door.

May 18 Noon Organ Recital Series (seventh season) St. Jude's Anglican Church, **Brantford**. Every Friday in May at 12.15 p.m.

May 25 Noon Organ Recital Series (seventh season) St. Jude's Anglican Church, **Brantford**. 12:15 p.m. Free. Featuring Joel Vanderzee, Organist Choirmaster St. John's - Kilmarnock School, Breslau.

June 6 Hollandse Dag 10 am at First CRC, 310 Kingscourt Ave., **Kingston**, Ont. Speaker: Rev John Klomps. For more info call 613-546-5615.

June 8-9 Immanuel Christian Schools of **Lethbridge**, Alberta, will celebrate 50 years of God's goodness. For more information, please call the business office at (403) 327-4233 or visit our website at www.immanuel-christian.org

June 13 Hollandse Dag, Moorefield Community Centre. See this issue.

June 17 Mountainview CRC **Grimsby**, will celebrate 50 years. Services will be held on Sunday, at 10 a.m. and 5 p.m. For more information, please contact the church office @ 905-945-0004 or email office@mountainviewcrc.org

July 2 Frisian picnic starting 11 a.m. at Pinehurst Lake Conservation Area, Paris, Ont. on Highway 24A. Contact us at: tjberg@hotmail.com.



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Hollandse Dag

June 6, 10 am at First Christian
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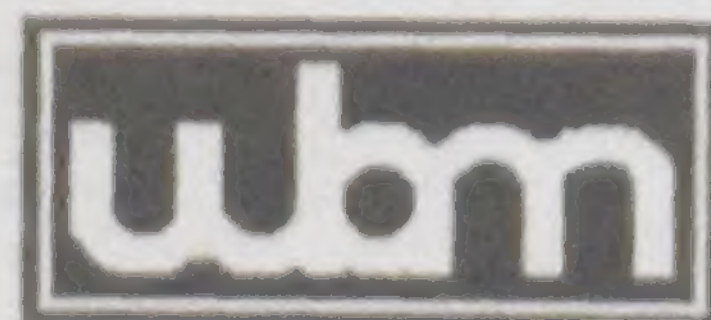
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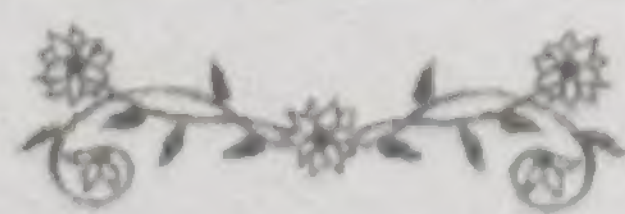
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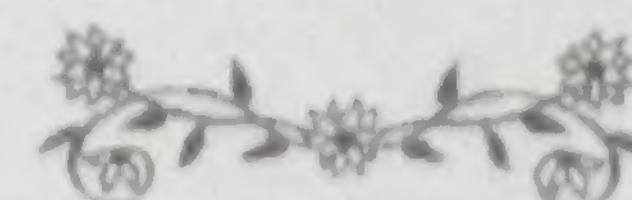
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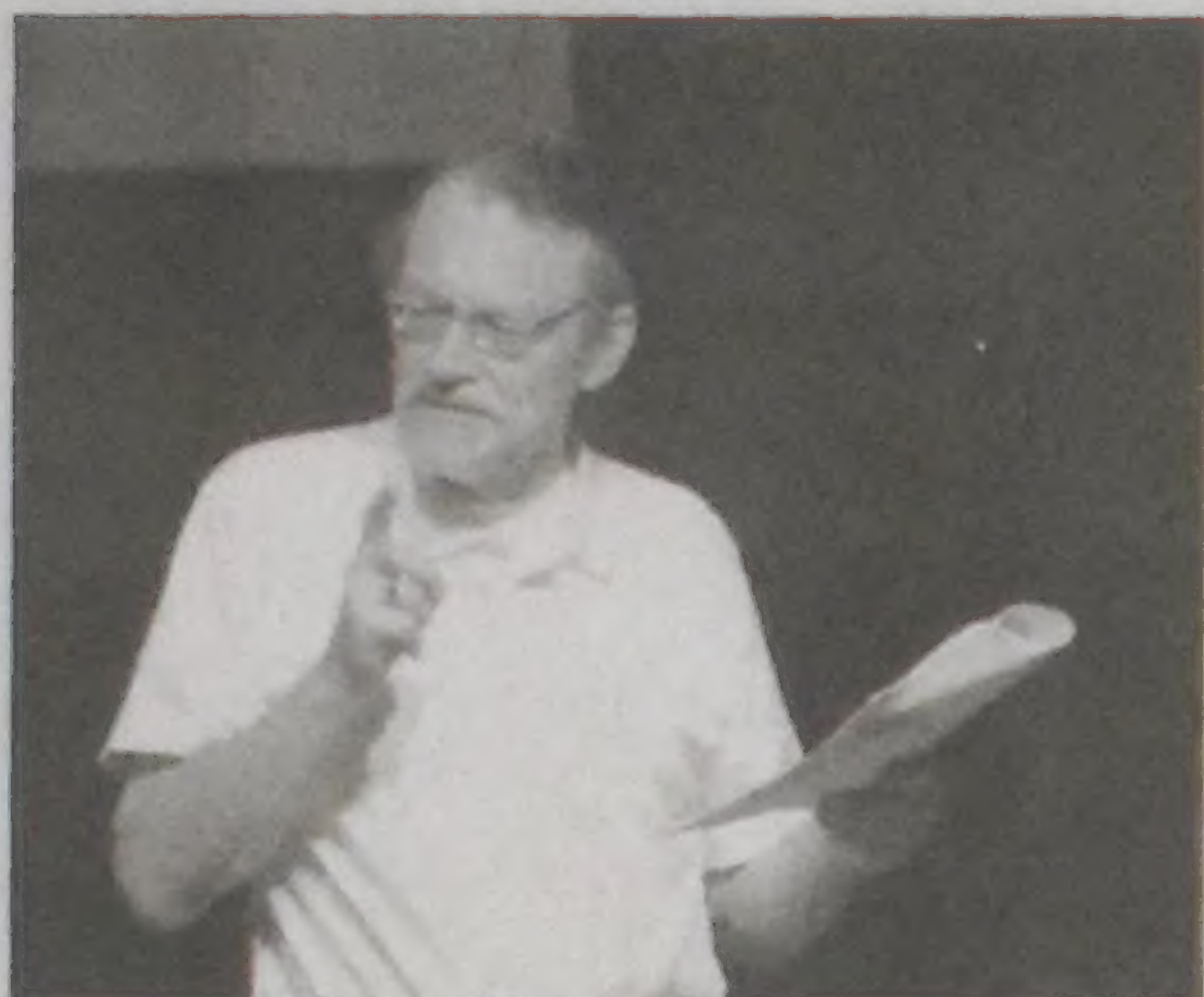


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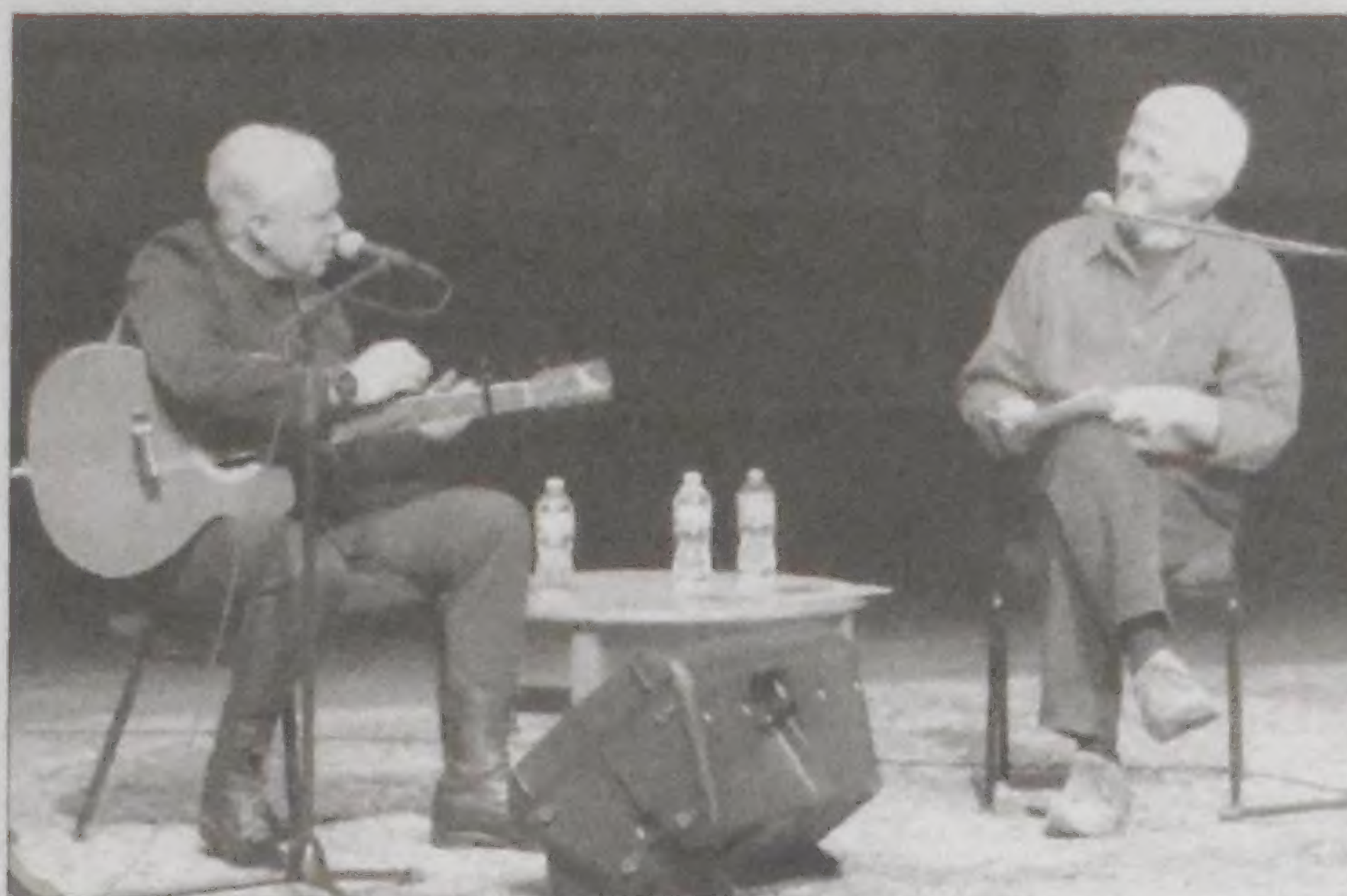


News

Festival of Faith and Writing roundup

**Walter Wangerin, Jr.**

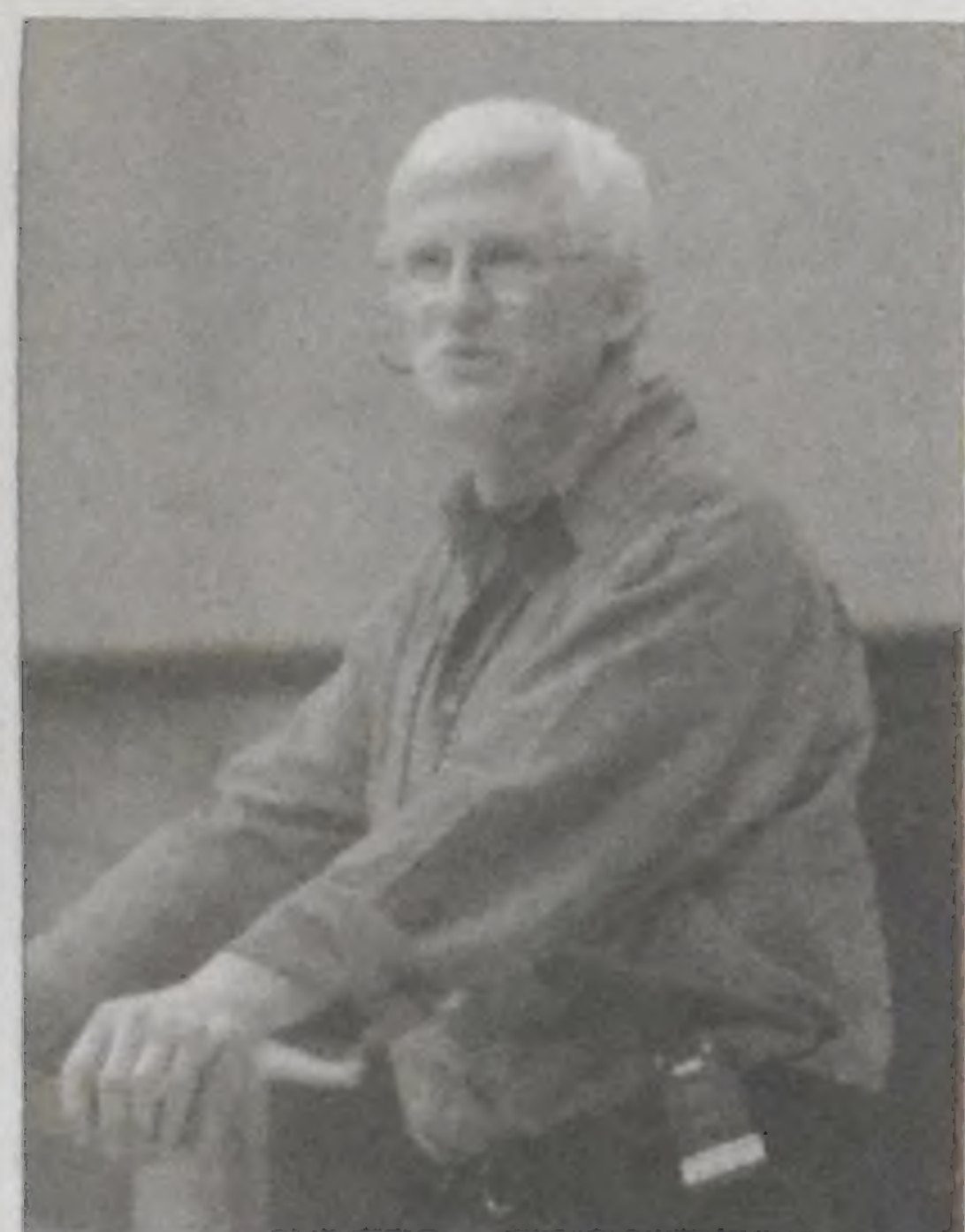
Walter Wangerin, Jr. spoke on writing and the business of creativity. Talking about the effect of a book on its audience, Wangerin suggested that reading is fundamentally different from literary criticism: "First you dwell in it, then you think about it.... Art is an event. After the experience you stand back and talk about the issues." He went on to offer advice for aspiring authors, noting that a writer needs to have a relationship with their readers and the community in which they're rooted: "You are not just an individual, you are entering a tradition. You are joining a choir. Know the past and the present."

**Bruce Cockburn**
in conversation with **Brian Walsh**

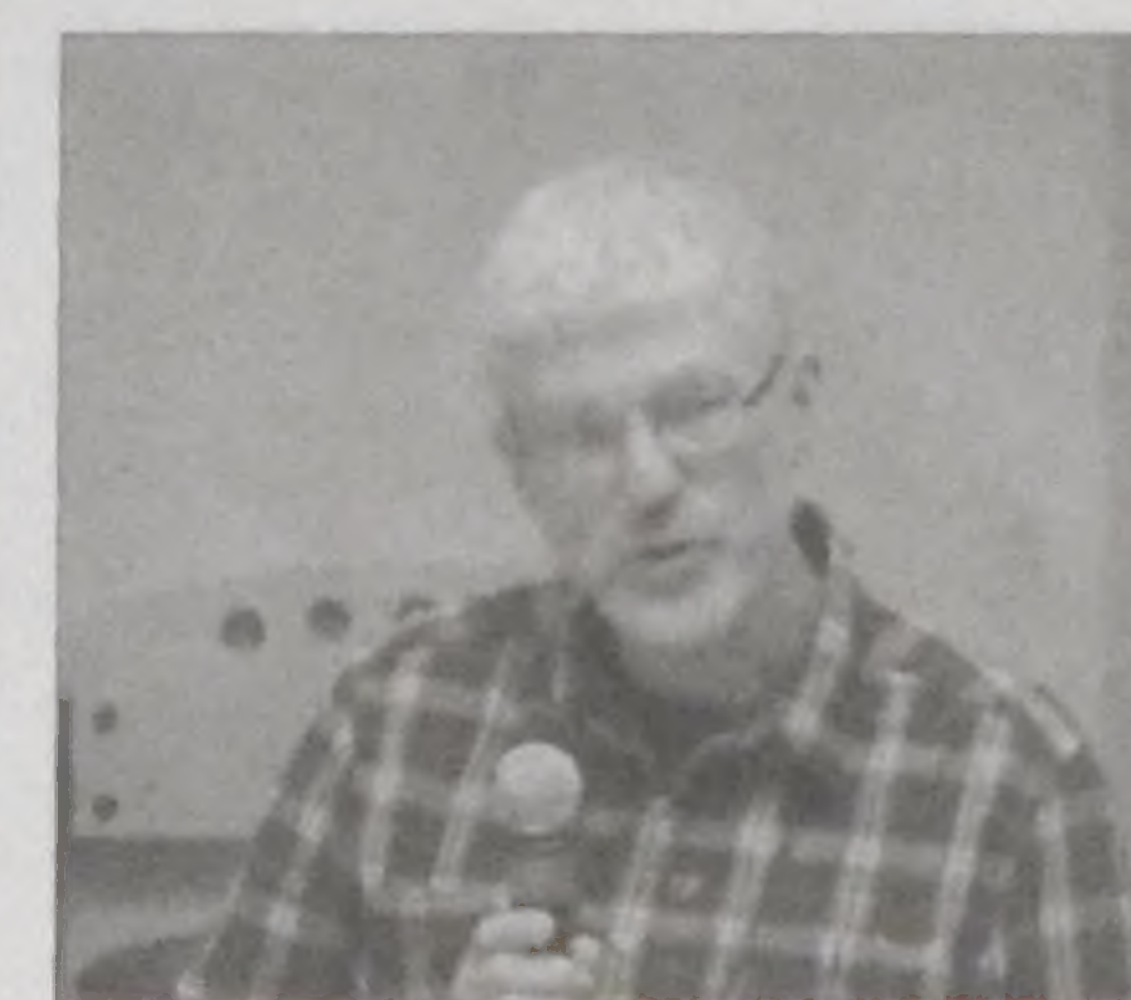
Singer-songwriter Bruce Cockburn was interviewed by Brian Walsh about social justice, the creative process, and "kicking at the darkness." Responding to Walsh's opening question about why he would come to a "Festival of Faith and Writing," Cockburn drew laughter from the audience by quickly answering: "For money." But things got more serious after that. Cockburn expressed a sense of awe about the power of language and story, and commented specifically on the value of the Christian narrative: "A powerful part of what the Christian story offers us is dancing in the face of pathology, the collective pathology we're all tuned into." When Walsh invited Cockburn to "talk about love for a bit," Cockburn suggested that "love is the word we have for what emanates from the divine ... [one day] they're going to find a particle that is the love particle." When asked to comment on what sustains him spiritually, Cockburn replied: "God. He does a lot more work than I do in that regard."

Brian Walsh

Brian Walsh spoke on the methodology of his new book *Kicking at the Darkness: Bruce Cockburn and the Christian Imagination*. After catching himself "in the act of interpretation" of Cockburn's song "Hills of Morning," Walsh asked "what is going on when we engage in this kind of theological interpretation?" He then suggested that such interpretation "must remain faithful to the work of art itself as it is brought into creative conversation with biblical faith, for the purpose of deepened cultural discernment and the awakening of the Christian imagination."

**Ann Voskamp**

On the issue of imagination, creativity, story and the ways in which language can be grounded in the material, earthly world to "offer real vision to real people," Voskamp emphasized the importance of poetic language in prose writing: "[Poetry is] language creating the possibility of an alternative future.... Without poetry, without imagining, we lack leaders." She went on to encourage others to find unique and poetic ways to express their own experience: "People are hungry for the voice of encounter. Your voice, coming out of an encounter with God."

**John Terpstra**

Speaking about writing the Dutch-Canadian immigrant experience, Terpstra noted that all Christians should be very familiar with the immigrant mentality: "We are willing immigrants. We have been welcomed with open arms into the country of grace."

Bethany Pierce

On the portrayal of "sexuality, violence [and] vice," Pierce noted that "Fiction.... doesn't need to mirror the world precisely to reflect its essence; fiction does, however, demand the freedom to incorporate these things where the development of character or plot or theme create an occasion for the 'vice' where its absence would only feel contrived.... More troublesome in offering too innocent an imaginary world, a book risks losing the weight of evil against which good contrasts its striking revelation. If you close your eyes as an author to the possibilities of evil that make beatific in contrast express moments of grace, you strike out a thousand variations in the human heart before you even set out to plumb its hidden depths."

**Shane Claiborne**

Claiborne shared some of his experiences as a Christian activist, inviting listeners to "re-imagine what it means to be the body of Christ alive in the world." Claiborne argued that Christians should be very concerned with homelessness and poverty: "How can we worship a homeless man on Sunday and ignore a homeless man on Monday?" But more generally he suggested Christians need to change their mentality in order to "join in God's revolution": "Stop complaining about the church you've experienced and start being the church you dream of.... Live in such a way as to blaze a trail of light behind you, so that you leave where you came from a more hopeful and beautiful place."

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Adichie opened by remarking that "it's nice to be in a place where faith is talked about without being dismissed." After speaking somewhat about her experience and creative process, Adichie explained that writing is "magic" because of the joy it brings. "I write because I love the solitude, and creating characters who sometimes speak to me. I love the possibility of touching another human being with my work.... Fiction has the ability to create meaning and create a radical truth." After elaborating about the potential of fiction and what her work sets out to do, Adichie closed by quoting the Botswana novelist Bessie Head: "I am building a stairway to the stars. I have the authority to take all of mankind up there with me. That is why I write."

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